

ARNOLD BENNETT

A STUDY IN REALISM

By

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Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis is the result of my independent research and that all sources of information have been acknowledged.

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PREFACE

*The purpose of playing...both at the first and now, was
and is to hold, as 'twere, the mirror to nature, to
show virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the
very age and body of the time his form and pressure.*

Hamlet

Although there has been virtually no disagreement among critics that Arnold Bennett was a realist, no substantial work has been done with regard to what kind of realist he was. The purpose of the present thesis therefore is to evaluate the particular nature of Bennett's realism. It will be assumed that Bennett's fiction is anchored not merely to a general tradition of realism, but to the French type of realism in particular. Throughout his career, Bennett made incessant efforts to remind the British public of the merits of the French realists, indeed, of French literature in general, and vigorously endeavoured to emulate his French forerunners in his own writing of fiction. This French commitment has a wider significance. At the present time, when English has become a kind of world language, and English literature is exerting an overwhelming influence on a world-wide scale, there has been a tendency to ignore the homogeneity of the literature of Western Europe, and to neglect the mutual influences of the various nation-states' literatures on one another. In such circumstances, it is of importance to draw attention to Bennett the English novelist's 'centrifugal' inclination.

Western literature has its roots in ancient Greek and Roman cultures, and was greatly enriched during the predominance of Christianity. As the Greek, Roman, and Christian constituents of Western culture all originated in an area inhabited by peoples who speak 'Latin' languages, the cultures and literatures of those peoples have often been referred to as 'Latin'. Whatever meaning it may have, the term 'Latin' connotes the origins of Western culture. The

literature of almost every nation-state of the present Europe has in a sense been generated by this profound source of inspiration, the literature of France even more than that of England. Starting from the Middle Ages, and stretching into the present century, the link between English culture and 'Latin' has to a great extent been realized through the French. Bennett was one of those English writers who made life-long conscious efforts to transfuse French elements into English fiction. This fact is of importance for a study not only of realism, but also of modernism, which originated largely in France.

It is for the above reasons that Chapter 1 is an exclusive account of the debate on realism in nineteenth-century France. In this chapter, various aspects of French realism and naturalism are described. Chapter 2 concentrates upon the French influences on Bennett. Chapter 3 demonstrates how the French realist and naturalist doctrine of hereditary and environmental determination is radically modified by Bennett. Using stylistic theories, Chapter 4 analyzes in detail the ways in which the French realists' doctrine of authorial impersonality manifests itself in Bennett's work. Chapter 5 deals with Bennett's application of the French realists' theory of artistic beauty to his own literary practice. The next chapter is devoted to the most important aspect of realism – the mimetic nature of art. Although this chapter is based upon the assumption that Bennett belongs fundamentally to the convention of realism, it also shows that he has his own specific methods. Chapter 7 examines the ways Bennett reconciles his artistic ideal, cultivated by his love of French realism, with the irresponsive British public, the result being a general moderation of his own realism. The last chapter is an account of Bennett's effort at moving away from the realist convention by using symbols.

Bennett's total fictional output can be divided neatly into two groups – one that deals with his native district the Potteries and the other which is set in London. It is assumed that his Five Towns fiction is superior to his London

fiction because the first category belongs to a period when Bennett was more of an artistic idealist than after 1918 when the Potteries virtually disappeared from his novels. It is for this reason that the thesis concentrates substantially on Bennett's Five Towns fiction. It should also be understood that the thesis will have little to do with Bennett's 'pot-boilers'. It focuses largely on The Old Wives' Tale (1908), Anna of the Five Towns (1902), the Clayhanger trilogy (1910-6), and Riceyman Steps (1923).

CHAPTER 1

FRENCH REALISM

Despite the argument that realism has been a literary phenomenon ever since the Iliad and the Odyssey, and that it has always been the defining characteristic of the novel form, it was in nineteenth-century France that realism attained its most coherent formulation, with echoes, parallels and variations elsewhere in Europe and America. A complex historical movement, French realism involves various aesthetic, social and scientific issues. It stands quite on its own in terms of theory and in the systematic application of its tenets to artistic practice. The point of view, best exemplified by Erich Auerbach's Mimesis (1948), that realism is an age-old, ubiquitous literary phenomenon, tends to extenuate the historical importance of French realism and reduce this many-sided movement to only one aspect – faithfulness to reality. Discussing the verisimilitude that characterizes both seventeenth-century Dutch painting and mid-nineteenth-century French painting, Linda Nochlin maintains:

Important though it might be, fidelity to visual reality was only one aspect of the Realist enterprise; and it would be erroneous to base our conception of so complex a phenomenon on only one of its features: verisimilitude.¹

Her argument applies equally to literary realism. Faithfulness to reality alone does not constitute realism.

According to Elbert B.O. Borgerhoff, 'realism' as a critical term was applied to literature as early as 1826 by an anonymous writer in an article which appeared in the Mercure français. It was used by Gustave Planche in 1833 and 1835 in a number of articles appearing in the Revue des deux mondes to describe a prosaic reconstruction of history which aimed at the achievement of a 'mathematical exactitude and precision'. In 1837 it was used by Planche to

describe an artistic attitude or school which had as its goal an exact reproduction not only of history but also of contemporary society. His conception of 'realism' was limited to the physical aspects of observable things and he regarded it as incompatible with beauty, the ideal of art.² The term was also used by Hyppolyte Fortoul in 1834.³ What these critics had in common in their early use of 'realism' was that they applied it to the method of those writers who are now commonly considered as romantics, such as Hugo, Mérimée, and Vitet. For instance, the anonymous critic of 1826 in the Mercur français wrote: 'This literary doctrine, which is gaining ground every day and which is leading towards a faithful imitation not of master works of art of the past but of the originals which nature offers us, can well be called *realism*.'⁴ Here he was opposing his 'realism' to something much more like classicism than romanticism, that is, to a literary school based on an imitation of the prototypal works of the past in terms of theme, plot and character. In his commentary on the contemporary historical novel in 1835 Planché observed: 'What seems impossible has existed and continues to exist. Realism in historical fiction already has a multitude of attentive disciples.'⁵ In his use of 'realism' he had in mind, for the most part, writers of historical drama and fiction. When Hyppolyte Fortoul used 'realism' in a review of Antony Thouret's Toussaint-le-Mulâtre he also associated it with romantic writers such as Hugo: 'M. Thouret wrote his book with an exaggeration of realism, which he has borrowed from the manner of M. Hugo.'⁶ Clearly, when romanticism as a literary movement was at its height all over Europe, realism was already there waiting to take its place. Borgerhoff believes that in the first half of the nineteenth century there existed a continuous, 'well-defined' current of realistic literature that was opposed to the poetical and the ideal.⁷ In this use of 'a well-defined current' he is making a distinction between realism of the 1820s and the 1830s, which interplays with romanticism, and that from the

1840s to the 1870s, which contrasts with romanticism.

If there existed some degree of confusion between realism and romanticism during the first decades of the nineteenth century, realism afterwards became increasingly conscious of its own identity as a distinct literary trend, particularly so in the 1850s. It was from its reaction against romanticism, which had been the dominant literary tendency for more than three decades, that realism emerged as an independent literary movement. It broke with the romantics' exaltation of the self and their emphasis on imagination; with their concern for myth and symbolism; with their obsession with the past and exotic subject matter; with their conception of animated nature. As early as 1834, Hyppolyte Babou gave a definition of what he called 'the novel of analysis', which could well be accorded the status of the first statement of the realist doctrine:

They [the analytic novelists] grasp the reflection of the sentiment and character of their personages in exterior and material objects; in their eyes, human existence is not wholly concentrated upon the centre of thought.⁸

The romantics' preoccupation with the subjective is being abandoned; great importance is attached to descriptions of external material phenomena because they are, in a sense, inseparable parts of a character's personality. The first manifesto of the realist school appeared when Fernand Desnoyers published his 'Du Réalisme' in L'Artiste. He proclaimed in this article: 'Realism is the true depiction of objects.' In this emphasis on exterior rather than interior aspects of reality, the romantic notion of art was rejected. Desnoyers continued to deride romanticism as being an anachronism:

The Rue de Rivoli like a sword has cut through old Paris from end to end. It was only there that the Romantics could dream of the Middle Ages! All they have left is their daggers, scrap iron, the click of which is to be heard only in the adventure of D'Artagnan... Paris street urchins yell in pursuit of the last

romantics.

And he triumphantly declared: 'At last realism *is coming*'⁹ The first issue of Réalisme, which appeared in July 1856, included an article by Jules Assezat which stated:

For the romantics the aim of literature is something fantastic; for us, art is something real, existing, comprehensible, visible and palpable: the scrupulous imitation of nature.¹⁰

After his attack on romanticism and his assertion of the principles of realism, Assezat further charged the romantics with having an exclusive mania for the ugly, the horrible, the extraordinary and the monstrous.¹¹ In his own short-lived review Réalisme, Duranty included a violent attack on the romanticism of Hugo. The article 'Les Contemplations de Victor Hugo' accused him of substituting affectation for sincerity and of making merchandise out of a false and facile sentimentality.¹² Champfleury in his Le réalisme satirized the romantic novelist who 'ignores his own time in order to dig up corpses from the past and dress them up in historical flippery.'¹³ These formulations of realism as opposed to romantic fantasy, idealism and spirituality gave all realist writers a strong family resemblance. However, romanticism as a literary tendency never became extinct. Realism, and naturalism – the logical development and more radical version of realism – felt its threat throughout the nineteenth century. As late as 1882, Maupassant felt it necessary to assert that the realists' 'mania for the lower elements...is only an excessively violent reaction against the exaggerated idealism that preceded it', and to reiterate the realists' 'scorn for those who sing of the dew.'¹⁴ Even when realism and naturalism themselves were becoming obsolete at the end of the century, their dismissal of romanticism still consistently contributed to their status as a distinct literary movement. It should be noted at this point that in its rejection

of romanticism, realism also broke with classicism, which the romantics themselves had contemptuously dismissed earlier. For the realists the classicists' concern with the highly-stylized and the purely abstract was diametrically opposed to their own doctrine. Attention, too, should be drawn to the fact that the contrast between romanticism and the new realistic trend was also apparent in the eighteenth-century English novel, in writers such as Defoe, Richardson and Fielding, who have usually been credited with the emergence of the novel as a new genre.

The first issue of Duranty's Réalisme which appeared on November 15th, 1856 contained the declaration: 'Realism has come to the conclusion of the *exact, sincere* reproduction of the social milieu of the era in which one lives.'¹⁵ In December, 1856 in the second number of Réalisme Duranty again noted that 'realism only demands of artists the study of their own era.'¹⁶ For Duranty, as well as for most French realists, realism should concern itself with immediate circumstances and a realist must concentrate on his own time. The romantics' preoccupation with the remote past is incompatible with it, since such a concern necessarily involves imagination. Realism, they maintain, must deal with exterior things which are real and tangible and exist in space and time in one's immediate daily life. In his formulation of realism in 1868 Laprade observed that realism should aim at 'the reproduction as exact, as direct as possible of the material quality of an object...to reproduce the material world with all of its most striking qualities.'¹⁷ In order to achieve a precise reproduction of the characteristics of the physical phenomena of his time, the novelist could not possibly resort to things belonging to the heroic and chivalrous ages. He must of necessity concentrate on his own era. Characters, for the realistic novelist, must be drawn from individuals existing in society as observed by the artist, with all their distinctive traits springing from their immediate environment. Naturally, they must be contemporary. Social

relationships between people from different ranks must also be given an accurate description in accordance with what the artist sees in contemporary society. Lower classes must be accorded the same attention as people from higher orders who had hitherto enjoyed too great an attention in literature.

Another distinct feature of the French realist movement in the mid-nineteenth century was its insistence on the equal claim to literary treatment of the ugly and vulgar as well as the beautiful, the elegant and the noble. The argument is basically that realism aims to attain truth, and truth is attainable only by observation of reality and a faithful representation of that reality in the work of art. A realist, who should be sincere and unprejudiced in his observation, must accept whatever exists as suitable subject for his art, the beautiful and the ugly both deserving artistic treatment. This theory finds its fine embodiment in the Goncourt brothers' Germinie Lacerteux which appeared in 1864 and, defying social decency as apprehended by the guardians of morals of the time, truthfully represented the ugly and the repulsive. Gustave Flaubert's Madame Bovary which first appeared in serial form in 1856-57, is a ruthlessly detailed study of the meanness, pretentiousness, stupidity and boredom of the life of the provincial bourgeoisie. Balzac, who, together with Stendhal, is generally regarded as a precursor of the professed realists and naturalists of the second half of the century, had portrayed the ignoble, crude and mean in a manner devoid of softening and embellishment. Drawing attention to this aspect of Balzac's work, Hyppolyte Taine said: 'It makes the ugly the more ugly.'¹⁸ J. -K. Huysmans spoke even more emphatically about this characteristic quality of realistic and naturalistic fiction:

Realism would seem to consist in choosing the most abject and trivial subjects, the most repulsive and lascivious descriptions, in a word, in bringing to light the sores of society. After removing the ointment and bandages which cover the most horrible sores, naturalism would seem to have only one goal, that of probing them to their frightful depths in public.¹⁹

It should be noted, however, that this realist-naturalist characteristic is not entirely original. As Erich Auerbach points out, certain poets who would usually be considered as having nothing to do with realism, such as Baudelaire, held similar views.²⁰

In some cases, this realistic doctrine asserted itself more strongly than its usual version. Monpont in his 'Gustave Flaubert: Madame Bovary' observed: 'Think, in preference to everything else, with the brush or pen, of the grossest and vulgarest scenes and objects...and do not give them up.'²¹ This radical insistence on the ugly as the sole object of artistic treatment substantially explains the realists' practice of treating illness in great detail and with great gusto. Never in good health themselves, the Goncourts showed an obsession with disease and with physical and mental degeneration. F. W. J. Hemmings observes: 'Sickbeds fascinated them, and if in the popular mind realism has come to equate with morbidity, the fault is more likely to lie with them than with any other writers.'²² For them, illness of one kind or another seems to be an inescapable condition in which the protagonists of their novels have to spend their lives. This conception underlies most of their works and was regarded as false and severely attacked by critics. In Germinie Lacerteux M. de Varandeuil suffers from apoplexy and dies of it, and his daughter – who is herself rheumatic – has to wait on him as servant for years. Germinie, the alcoholic and nymphomaniac heroine, is nearly killed by puerperal fever on one occasion, later on suffers from pleurisy and pneumonia, and finally dies of consumption. In Renée Mauperin (1864), after Henry Mauperin is killed in a duel, his sister Renée Mauperin, feeling guilty for her part in the disaster, dies of a heart disease brought about by intense remorse. The Goncourts are effusive in their pathetic account of the sick Renée:

She no longer seemed to animate all that she touched. Her clothes fell loosely round her in folds as they do on old people.

Her step dragged along, and the sound of her little heels was no longer heard. When she put her arms round her father's neck, she joined her hands awkwardly, her caresses had lost their pretty gracefulness. All her gestures were stiff. She moved about like a person who feels cold or who is afraid of taking up too much space. Her arms, which were generally hanging down, now looked like the wet wings of a bird... When she was walking in front of her father, with her bent back, shrunken figure, her arms hanging loosely at her sides, and her dress almost falling off her, it seemed to M. Mauperin that this could not be his daughter.²³

Simply because of its obsession with disease, the last joint effort of the brothers, Madame Gervaisais (1869), was unanimously rejected by critics and the brothers wrote in their journal: 'since our book appeared, painful days. Not a letter, not a word, no response by anyone except for a warm handshake from Flaubert.'²⁴ As in the case of Renée Mauperin, the decay of Madame Gervaisais is given an elaborate depiction:

She sank to the perfect imitation of death in life, to *death of the spirit*, which the Fathers of the Church so properly compare to natural death, and to which they attribute the effects, outcomes and consequences of natural death. As death itself, her person, full of abjection, preserved no more will than a corpse between the hands of pall-bearers. As in death itself, shame, confusions, disgraces, affronts, injustices, praises and scorns, misfortune and happiness could pass through her without even a sign of movement about her.²⁵

The hostile reaction to Madame Gervaisais was such that as late as March, 1895, Edmond Goncourt noted thankfully in his journal that Zola 'is kind enough to mention Madame Gervaisais.'²⁶ Zola's sympathy is understandable. He too employed lengthy, detailed descriptions of diseases in many of his novels, notably, L'Assommoir and Nana.

The obsession with disease undoubtedly contributed to the impression that realism dealt exclusively with things mean, vulgar and low. As early as 1847 Calernard de Lafayette had blamed realism for taking pleasure in the 'ugly' and in 'a gross and mean imitation.'²⁷ Victor Fournel in 1861 charged realism with

being obsessed with what was simply not worth the trouble to portray – the base sides of human nature.²⁸ It is hardly surprising that realism, emerging from a general reaction against romanticism and classicism, occasionally showed a lack of moderation in maintaining its beliefs. However, as both Marcel Crouzet and Bernard Weinberg point out, this kind of reproach found only a few echoes.²⁹

If the realists' concern for the ugly and the low in seeking truth met with relatively mild opposition, chiefly from a literary point of view, the related issue of morality caused them serious problems. Their doctrine that whatever exists deserves literary treatment and should be represented objectively led to a frankness about sexuality, which, understandably enough, was interpreted as immorality by the guardians of morality. Attacks came from two fronts: that of critics and that of the State. Speaking about Madame Bovary, a largely sympathetic Sainte-Beuve nevertheless held that 'there are details which are very sharp, scabrous... and stimulating to the sensory emotions,' and that Flaubert should not have gone so far.³⁰ Both Flaubert and the Goncourts were dragged before the police court for their audacious handling of sexuality.³¹ The charge of immorality is, as Weinberg's study shows, of a much later appearance than many others, although it had very early been applied to Stendhal and Balzac. Before 1857, there were only isolated attacks on realism as immoral, but with the publication of Madame Bovary, regular censure began to be directed at the realists in general. Some critics blamed them for choosing the 'bad world', that of prostitutes for instance, as their subject matter; for totally neglecting the 'moral truth'; and for concentrating on the sensual.³² Some others, however, believed that subject matter in itself was not immoral, but the manner in which the realists treated it was immoral.³³ Thus, the charges of immorality were of various types. The realists usually defended themselves by maintaining that moral consideration was irrelevant to art. It

was even reductive and devaluative for art. Art should be placed above everything else, in itself and for itself. Flaubert noted in 1856: 'The moral of Art consists in its very beauty, and above all I hold style in high regard, and then the True.'³⁴ When realism reached its naturalistic stage, attacks on the frank treatment of sex, violence, cruelty and obscene language became virulent and the naturalists were sonorous in defending both their doctrines and artistic practice. In the late 1860s, in response to the accusation that the naturalists had no other subjects than obscenity, Emile Zola defended himself by declaring: 'I found myself in the same position as those painters who copy the nude without themselves being touched by the slightest sexual feeling.'³⁵ The position Zola takes here is simply that whatever he does in his work is out of a pure artistic motivation. Later on, in 'Obscene Literature', this same argument was repeated at some length:

Genuine artists have love for language, and passion for the truth... The proprieties, the sentiments resulting from education, the salute of little girls and hesitating wives, the regulations of the police, and the morals patented by good minds, have disappeared and no longer count. The artists are going to the truth, to the master work, despite all, and above all, without bothering themselves about the scandalousness of their audacity.³⁶

The point is expressed even more explicitly and assertively in 'Morality in Literature' in which Zola maintains that talent is the only criterion by which an artist is to be judged, the question of morality or immorality being insignificant: 'I do not know what people mean by a moral writer and an immoral one; but I know very well what an author is who has talent and what an author is who does not. And, so long as an author has talent, I hold in high esteem all that is permitted to him.'³⁷ (As both articles were written in immediate response to the accusation that the crudity of L'Assommoir and Nana was to blame for the appearance of Gil Blas, a newspaper specialized in

'entertaining anecdotes ', a further point is made that the 'immoral' literature of nineteenth-century France is an inevitable result of the development of French culture as a whole.³⁸) Similar views are to be found in Huysmans's 'Emile Zola and L'Assommoir', which is a vigorous defence of Zola's novel against the charge of social impropriety. Like Zola, Huysmans strongly asserts the supremacy of art against any social consideration.³⁹

Speaking about the rise of realism, Damian Grant observes: 'It rose out of an appeal to the evident truth of the external world and sustained itself by the discipline and privilege of science.'⁴⁰ This is in fact a point on which there has been virtually no disagreement among critics. The emergence of realism to its position of dominance over romanticism involved much more than a mere change of literary fashion. The single influence that did most to accomplish this process, as the nineteenth century drew on, was science, which was then establishing itself as the most salient characteristic of the age. With the solid and positive support of science, realism denied the existence of a metaphysical or transcendental reality inaccessible to ordinary sense perception. It maintained instead that reality should be viewed as something immediately at hand, common to daily human experience and open to observation. In the first decades of the century Stendhal had scrutinizingly analyzed the conduct of his characters in a cool scientific manner. Balzac had treated social types as though they were natural species, drawing a parallel between man in society and the animal kingdom in nature. During the 1860s, with the argument over Darwin's Origin of Species, it became conceivable to view man as an evolutionary product of natural environment. The Goncourts could now positively declare in their preface to Germinie Lacerteux: 'Now that the novel has become, by analysis and by psychological research, contemporary moral history, now that the novel has taken upon itself the study and duties of science, it may claim a similar freedom and privilege.'⁴¹

Passing his largely favourable judgment on Madame Bovary, the leading critic of the time Sainte-Beuve acknowledged the scientific spirit of the age:

In many places, and in diverse forms, I believe that I have recognized new literary signs: science, the spirit of observation, maturity, force, a bit of roughness... Son and brother of distinguished doctors, M. Gustave Flaubert holds the pen as others hold the scalpel.⁴²

Social milieu and moral predicament are scrutinized closely in a cool surgical manner – these are characteristic of the ‘new literature’. Later on, in his study of French realism, Pierre Martino made similar remarks on this literary phenomenon: ‘All that which is material can be scientifically observed and, to a certain extent, evaluated; thus we are allowed to formulate rules; the novel and criticism can thus pretend to be a science of the soul.’⁴³ This alliance of science with literature was based on the realists’ fundamental assumption that art should represent life exactly as it is. To achieve this exactitude in representation art must make use of scientific methods. When realism took the form of naturalism, its union with science became so notorious that it was even accused of using science to displace art. To Zola the novel should submit to the scientific spirit, and in ‘Experimental Novel’ his confidence in the scientific method is unreserved:

If the experimental method leads to a knowledge of physical life, it should also lead to a knowledge of emotional and intellectual life... We should operate on characters, on their passions, on facts related to man and society, as the chemist and the physician operate on inert corpses, as the physiologist operates on living bodies.⁴⁴

He continues by asserting that novels of pure imagination will be replaced by ‘novels of observation and experiment.’⁴⁵ For him, as for the early realists, the novelist must use the same method as the scientist if he aims at a truthful representation of life. The difference is that, just as naturalism has generally

been regarded as the more radical version of realism, Zola's assertion of the novel's alliance with science also takes a much more emphatic form than his precursors' theory and practice and is marked by a lack of moderation.

Another inevitable result of the realists' claim to a scientific approach is authorial impersonality, which has Flaubert as its most forceful advocate both in theory and in practice. The doctrine is basically that the author should be completely absent from his presentation of characters and events. He should maintain an absolute detachment or aloofness. Unlike the issue of morality, which roused boisterous quarrels chiefly for social reasons, this theory was attacked from both aesthetic and social points of view. The debate began with the publication of Madame Bovary. Though the influential critic Sainte-Beuve judged it favourably by praising the scientific spirit in it, most critics objected to it violently. Even Duranty, despite his realistic stand, considered it cold, devoid of vitality, and obsessed with scientific demonstration. A repeated accusation was that it had no imagination, no emotion and no positive moral commitment.⁴⁶ In response to these reproaches, Flaubert, like other realists who had met with criticism for one reason or another, insisted on the supremacy of art, arguing that authorial impersonality was a purely aesthetic matter. What those critics missed, as Flaubert and his supporters maintained, was that under the detached appearance or tone of the novel, there stirs a deep emotion and a coherent mood that is to be found in the gradual accumulation of apparently coldly presented facts. The effect has been well described by a later critic as a 'union of feeling and calm'.⁴⁷ In one of his letters to Louise Colet, Flaubert himself expressed his annoyance at the critics' incomprehension:

One writes with one's head, If the heart warms it, that would be even better; but it doesn't do to say so. It ought to be an invisible fire and thereby we avoid amusing the public with ourselves, which I find horrible, or too naive, and with the

personality of the writer, which always reduces a work.⁴⁸

Flaubert's theory was later on better exemplified in L'Education sentimentale (1869), and in the 1870s and 1880s became widely accepted as a principle for the writing of fiction. Flaubert's most explicit statement on the issue was made in a letter dated March 18th, 1857:

It is one of my principles that one must not *write oneself*. The artist ought to be in his work as God in creation, invisible and omnipotent; he should be felt everywhere but not seen... and moreover, Art should rise above personal feelings and nervous susceptibilities!⁴⁹

It should be noted here that though Flaubert did acknowledge the combination of reason and passion in his assertion of authorial impersonality, the obvious fact that an absolute absence of the author from his work is ultimately impossible seemed to escape his attention. The author's tone of voice is felt throughout, no matter how detached he might seem. A work of art is necessarily stamped with the personality of its creator. No reader of Madame Bovary should miss the vulgarity and pettiness of the provincial bourgeoisie, nor overlook the deep compassion towards the poor and the miserable that emerges out of a seemingly dispassionate presentation. In certain cases, this is quite obvious. For instance, Flaubert's portrait of Catherine Leroux, particularly his description of the hands of this aged peasant woman, deformed with toil, in definite contrast to Emma, strike a uniquely humanitarian tone.⁵⁰ Seen from a symbolic point of view, the account of the poor blind man singing, following the coach in which Emma sits comfortably thinking of her lover Leon, reveals much more than the coldly presented facts themselves.⁵¹ There can be no denial that underneath the apparent aloofness of Madame Bovary there stirs profound sympathy.

A third notable characteristic in the alliance of literature with science is the

tendency to reduce human beings to an inanimateness and to view external phenomena, animate or inanimate, as mere things. This could to some extent be regarded as a result of the realists' abandonment of the romantics' indulgence in self-exaltation, but science deserves the greater share of the merit since its very essence lies in observation and analysis. Apart from science, the unprecedented flourishing of the visual arts may also lay claim as an important contributing factor. There now emerged in literature a more distinct demarcation line than before between internal and external perspectives. If one could call realism 'thingism', as some critics do, it then can be said that it was 'thing-izing' external animate phenomena in the novel. Sainte-Beuve's famous metaphor that Flaubert holds the pen as others hold the scalpel effectively illustrates the point. Characters in Flaubert's work are examined in the cool manner of surgery as if they were inert bodies. Zola, the most vociferous of the realist-naturalist theorists, observed in 1868 in the preface to the second edition Thérèse Raquin:

I have chosen people completely dominated by their nerves and blood, without free will, drawn into each action of their lives by the inexorable laws of their physical nature. Thérèse and Laurent are human animals, nothing more.⁵²

Though Zola does not explicitly conclude that Thérèse and Laurent are mere physical objects, the degradation of human beings to the level of animals already implicitly indicated the direction in which he would have gone had he pursued his point further. Later on, in 'The Experimental Novel', he pursued this view further:

Science proves that the conditions of existence of all phenomena are the same for living bodies as for inert corpses... When we have proved that man's body is a machine, the parts of which we shall some day be able to dismantle, and to assemble again at the will of the experimenter, we shall then go on to the passional and intellectual acts of man.⁵³

In this somewhat effusive manner, living bodies, including those of human beings, are regarded as machines. Animate and inanimate bodies are conditioned by the same physical environment, therefore they should be treated alike. The novelists should view external phenomena as sheer physical facts determined by fixed laws, and deal with them indiscriminately in a dispassionate scientific manner.

In its overwhelming concentration on contemporary life and with the positive support of science, realism triumphantly condemned romanticism as obsolete and declared the ultimate advent of itself. However, nineteenth-century French critics, in their exclusive concern for the aesthetic aspects of realism, showed scarcely any interest in its possible social and historical origins. It was only well into the twentieth century that a parallel was drawn between the rise of the bourgeoisie and the rise of the novel as a new genre, and realism began to be regarded as the defining characteristic that differentiates the work of eighteenth-century novelists from earlier fiction. In this association of capitalism with the new novel form, some Anglo-American critics challenged the orthodox status of French realism. Since the Industrial Revolution started in Britain and commercial and industrial classes emerged earlier on this island than in France, the ultimate merit for the rise of the new form of fiction should go to such eighteenth-century English novelists as Defoe, Richardson and Fielding rather than to French writers. Romance, as an older form of fiction, was condemned by Arnold Kettle from a Marxist point of view as the non-realistic, aristocratic literature of feudalism:

It was non-realistic in the sense that its underlying purpose was not to help people cope in a positive way with the business of living but to transport them to a world different, idealized, *nicer* than their own. It was aristocratic because the attitudes it expressed and recommended were precisely the attitudes the ruling class wished (no doubt usually unconsciously) to

encourage in order that their privileged position might be perpetuated.⁵⁴

The impulse towards realism in prose literature was an inseparable part of the revolution which brought about the breakdown of feudalism: the revolutionaries were the commercial and industrial bourgeoisie. Unlike the feudal lords, the middle class felt no immediate threat of revelations of the truth and so they did not fear realism. In his study of the novel as a literary genre, Ian Watt makes the same point that realism is the defining characteristic of the novel form and lays much emphasis on the emergence of a middle-class reading public as a necessary condition for the rise of the novel. The emergence of this reading public is in turn attributed to even more important factors – the great political and economic power of the middle class as a whole, the individualistic spirit it represented and the individualistic social order it brought about.⁵⁵ It was with the political and economic prominence of the middle class that literature began to view trade, commerce and industry seriously, and to portray low life: Moll Flanders is a thief and Pamela a servant. It was in fact making a comprehensive attempt to portray the varieties of human experience. The hitherto dominant form of romance, with its chivalry and adventures that belong to a past tradition, should therefore give place to a genre that could realistically, therefore more adequately, express the ethos of the capitalist age – the novel. Similar views are to be found in Harry Levin's Th Gates of Horn (1963). While tracing epic and romance to their military and courtly sources respectively, he believes that the novel, with realism as its defining feature, is very much a characteristic of the capitalist era.⁵⁶ Seen in the light of these Anglo-American critics, the rise of realism as an independent literary movement in France too is clearly attributable to the political and economic prominence of the French middle classes. The chaotic period of the Revolution had passed. Although the Bourbon monarchy had

been restored to the throne, the Revolution had left its trace on every aspect of national life, and the spirit of Freedom, Equality and Brotherhood had survived. With the advent of the July Revolution in 1830, France was to be governed ostensibly by a bicameral parliament under the 'bourgeois King' Louis-Philippe, but in reality it was the financial and commercial classes that exercised control. During the next two decades of middle-class rule, France experienced steady industrial expansion: railways spread, factories opened, peasants left the land and flocked to the towns only to find a deplorably hard life there.⁵⁷ There was a striking discord between self-exalting romanticism and harsh reality. A new literary mode became necessary for the expression of this reality. Hence realism.

With the rapid progress of science in various areas, especially the appearance of the Darwinian theory that organisms, however sophisticated, are the products of natural evolution, the realist and naturalist novelists were in a position to claim for fiction the task of describing and examining the possible influences of environmental and hereditary forces on the character and eventual destiny of individuals. This is another aspect of the realist-naturalist movement entirely inspired by the scientific spirit of the age and very much concerned with the 'lower classes'. In the 1860s, Hyppolyte Taine had put forward the formula that literature is determined by race, circumstances and epoch. To a considerable extent, the chiefly naturalistic doctrine of hereditary and environmental determination was derived from this view of Taine's.⁵⁸ Realist-naturalist fiction was no longer satisfied with a mere categorization of social types, and the issue was raised as to whether people born and brought up in the crushingly limited environment of the working-class world in the nineteenth century could truly be held responsible for the evil that befell them. Germinie Lacerteux, in this sense, could be regarded as the first novel to ask such a question, and novelists of Zola's type later on showed a much more

absorbed concern with the issue. In Germinie Lacerteux, the heroine's secret indulgence in alcohol and her nymphomania are discovered by her mistress towards the end of the story. Through Mlle. de Varandeuil's reflections, the Goncourts raised the question: what could have become of Germinie had heredity and environment not made her the creature that she is?⁵⁹ Here lies the germ of the conflict between the hypothetical alternatives of personal responsibility and determinism which was bound to assume greater significance in the work of the naturalists, to whom should be ascribed the invariable image of realism and naturalism as blatantly deterministic, pessimistic and defeatist. George Becker believes that if ever naturalism is to be differentiated from realism, the most important factors must be the explicit position taken by those whose names are usually associated with Zola that man is caught in a net of adverse circumstances from which he cannot escape and in which he degenerates.⁶⁰ Clearly, the emphasis on heredity and environment is particularly a characteristic of naturalism. This sort of philosophy is expressly stated by Zola in 'The Experimental Novel':

I believe that the question of heredity has a great influence on the intellectual and passional behaviour of man. I also accord considerable importance to environment... Man is not alone; he lives in a society, in a social milieu, and hence for us novelists the social milieu is unceasingly modifying phenomena.

Introducing the question of the reciprocal influence of society on the individual and of the individual on society, Zola defines the function of the 'experimental novel' as being:

To have a full knowledge of the mechanism of phenomena in man, to show the working of intellectual and sensory manifestations under the influences of heredity and the surrounding circumstances as physiology will explain them to us, then to show man living in the social milieu that he himself has produced, which he is modifying every day, and in which he in his turn is experiencing a continuous transformation.⁶¹

Less than three years after the publication of Germinie Lacerteux, with the Goncourts' militant preface to it, Thérèse Raquin presented an even more vigorous case of individuals acted upon by environmental and hereditary forces. The guilty love affair between Thérèse and Laurent that leads to their murder of Camille, the husband of Thérèse, is shown to be ultimately a consequence of their animal instincts. The suicide-pact towards the end of the novel, together with the events preceding it, only show that individual minds have undergone profound modifications under the pressure of environmental forces, as Zola himself explained in his preface to the novel.⁶² Shortly after the publication of Thérèse Raquin, Zola started his ambitious Les Rougon-Macquart series, which aims to show the working of the laws of genetics and, for this purpose, employs a temporal span of five generations. The Rougon-Macquart family expands in the second and third generations, contracts in the fourth, and finally perishes in the fifth. The wrong-doings of the original progenitors of the family are inexorably transmitted to their descendents, the genetic forces being so powerful that none of the family members is immune to the 'vices' committed by his or her ancestors. Zola was thorough in applying his philosophic doctrine to his work of art. A noticeable characteristic of this aspect of the realist-naturalist phenomenon is a dispassionately expressed attitude, not unsympathetic, on the part of the writers towards the lower classes. Yet these artists were usually more concerned with how to represent, objectively as they believed, the kind of life full of various sorts of 'vice' led by lower-class people than with how, through their art, to bring about some change to this life, however insignificant it might seem. In other words, they tried to maintain their aesthetic principles at the expense of social commitment. In claiming complete objectivity when observing and representing reality, the naturalists over-emphasized heredity and environment as determining factors in shaping the life of man. They were

fitting their characters into a scientific formula that they only imperfectly understood and that cannot by itself sufficiently explain the complex nature of reality.

Whereas in the sphere of philosophy science encouraged the growth of positivism, in literature it gave the realists and naturalists confidence in their assumption of the ultimate representability of reality. Man as a social and moral being, they maintained, was fundamentally not unlike an animal that could be studied scientifically. Positivistic as this belief might seem, it also implies a certain sense of loss – man had been uprooted from and deprived of his traditional social and moral values. Following the 1848 Revolution and the erection of the Second Empire, there emerged a general social cynicism throughout France. A succession of tumultuous social upheavals had destroyed the predominance of the aristocracy, but had established in its place only the monetary reign of the bourgeoisie. Realism, being essentially a middle-class conviction, both protested against and expressed this predominantly bourgeois society. Hence its dual character – the artistic confidence and the glaring cynicism that prevailed throughout the nineteenth century and persisted well into the twentieth century.

As has been shown, the realist-naturalist movement is a many-sided phenomenon. If there is one aspect of it that is of overriding importance, this must be its imitation theory of art. It was this that provoked violent attacks when realism first appeared, and it has remained controversial ever since. It is an aspect of realism that has met with more scorn than any other, so much so that 'realism' to many critics has become a term of only negative value. The origins of the theory can be traced to Plato's Republic and Aristotle's Poetics, but the vigour with which the nineteenth-century French realists maintained their beliefs in the mimetic nature of art deserves a close look. It should be noted here that there was a parallel development between realism in literature

and realism in painting. Gustave Courbet was a close friend of Champfleury. The first article of the short-lived magazine Réalisme was devoted by Duranty to painting rather than to the novel. And a large number of poets and novelists – Baudelaire, Gautier, Zola and the Goncourts, for instance – were committed to both. The realist writers and realist painters alike held that art should be an exact reproduction of nature or reality. In 1841 Gautier described realism as : ‘ the strict and exclusive imitation of reality’; Clement de Ris in 1858: ‘a scrupulous representation of exterior objects’; Bonnassieux in 1851: ‘the exact imitation of nature as it is’; Delaborde in 1853: ‘the positive reproduction of reality’; Poincelot in 1851: ‘the minute and systematic reproduction of reality, with no aspiration towards the ideal’; Delaplace in 1864: ‘to have as one’s supreme ambition the exactitude of painting’; Laprade in 1868: ‘the representation of what falls upon the senses, in such a manner as to deceive the senses themselves’.⁶³ These remarks are marked by a strong assertiveness and a striking homogeneity. In fact, this mimetic notion of art had been put forward explicitly as early as 1830 by Stendhal in Scarlet and Black:

A novel is a mirror carried along a high road. At one moment it reflects to your vision the azure skies, at another the mire of the puddles at your feet.⁶⁴

The pervading spirit of science in the nineteenth century led to a positive sense of certainty about the substantiality of the external world, and to a rejection of the metaphysical and the transcendental. Arthur Macdowall argues:

The scientific temper implies a shifting of attention from the individual self to all that lies outside it and beyond... The subjective, lyrical inspiration loses prestige. The objective – all that can be known, seen, experienced by you or another as well as by me – gains it in exchange. The habit grows of looking at things for their own sake and in themselves.⁶⁵

This is a situation similar to that of pre-Socratic Greece, where there had prevailed a philosophic preoccupation with the external world, the object and its origins, without being sceptical about its ultimate values and without much consideration of man – the subject, the self. Since science then had only been in its embryonic state, this philosophic belief sprang largely out of an instinctive conviction that the external world is real. Now, with the positive support of science, the French realists were not only certain about the reality of external phenomena but also believed that this reality could be accurately observed and represented, be it a landscape, the physique of a person or a moral predicament. Hence the theory of art as being an exact reproduction of nature.

One crucial feature of the imitation theory of realism was the preoccupation of the novelists with physical details, a tendency that has sometimes been labelled as 'trivialism'. Balzac could devote two thousand words to the description of a house in Eugénie Grandet (1834) and Madame Bovary met with the following attack when it first appeared:

Its details have been set down one by one, each given the same value; each street, each house, each room, each brook, each blade of grass is fully described; each character when he first arrives on the scene makes preliminary remarks on a host of useless and uninteresting topics.⁶⁶

This phenomenon undoubtedly has to do with the scientific spirit of the age – the perspective of human cognizance was being rapidly expanded, in both macroscopic and microscopic directions. In the realm of fiction, as in that of painting, the realists were drawing minute attention to the physical appearance not only of objects but also of people. Hence the common description of realism as 'anatomy' and 'surgery'. Obviously, the realists' purpose was to achieve a resemblance to life in the greatest possible degree – the artistic reconstruction of certain circumstances based on actual models. Their

specification of details is by no means useless, but very often aims at the creation of a fictional environment which not only provides the background information necessary for the work of art as a whole, but also reflects the sentiment and character of their personages. It is therefore an inseparable part of their art.

Closely connected with the notion of art imitating life was the realists' use of documentation in the composition of a work set in contemporary times – a systematic investigation of a specific aspect of real life. Balzac had in 1828 paid a special visit to Brittany to gather information for Les Chouans (1829), and by talking to the older inhabitants he had been able to collect a mass of authentic detail concerning the civil war which had been fought there thirty years before. However, it was the Goncourts who, among the French novelists, were the first to make consistent use of documentation to write about contemporary scenes. When realism developed into its more emphatic form, the naturalists exploited the method to an unprecedented degree. Zola is said to have paid visits, note-book in hand, to the locale where the action of his novels was to take place. He went backstage for the theatre scenes in Nana (1880), and descended down the shaft of a mine before he began Germinal (1885).⁶⁷ The motivation that lay behind such practice was the attainment of artistic authenticity: whatever happens in fiction could be authenticated somewhere in real life.

This method met with the most violent opposition. Some critics accused the realists and naturalists of reducing art to mere mechanical copying and photographing; of minimizing art to something that violated the basic principles of art, for what after all is there to distinguish from a mere photograph a novel that only copies? Some others maintained that art must be ultimately an idealization of nature and must be an aspiration of the intelligence towards immaterial beauty. It followed from this that the ideal is

superior in every sense to the real. While the realists, in holding their doctrine of the exact reproduction of nature and of contemporary society, denied the essential aim of art – the quest for the beautiful and the ideal. The most typical of those critics was Albert Aubert, who asserted: 'The novel...is not "a succession of petty real facts", the ideal should also have its role in it, the ideal...a grand word.'⁶⁸ In their accusations against the new literary movement, such critics tended to exaggerate the realists' disdain for the ideal and to equate realism with the negation of the beautiful and therefore of art itself. Some even maintained that the realist sought to embody in their products only the observable and the verifiable because they lacked talent and were forced to invent an art which could do without genius. They also argued that artistic truth had little to do with the material and the factual, for metaphysically, truth could mean something much more profound and far-reaching than concrete physical facts. The realists were therefore fundamentally wrong when they took material reality as truth and tried to reproduce it as it was.⁶⁹ Critics did not forget either to point out that imitation is a means rather than the end of art, and that when an artist claims to have reproduced reality as it is, in this very process he has unavoidably added his personal reaction or impression to his work, exactness and completeness in imitation being therefore nonsensical. It is hardly surprising that when realism as a literary and artistic tendency acquired a self-consciousness for the first time in history, it still had to wait to be adequately formulated into a consistent theory. All the remarks quoted above of the realists from the mid-nineteenth century concerning mimesis are characterized by an over-simplification that makes this aspect of realism an easy target for criticism. Since the realists laid so much emphasis on the exact and truthful representation of reality, the question might well be asked what it is after all that they claim to reproduce or imitate. It could be possible to assume, as the

ancient Greeks instinctively did, that what man perceives with his senses is REAL and exists independently of him in time and space. It could also be assumed that to believe this is one of man's fundamental and deep-rooted convictions. These assumptions have semantic support. Etymologically, the English adjective 'real' derives from the Medieval French 'real', itself from the Late Latin 'realis', the adjective of 'res', which means property, a thing, as distinct from persons. Yet, these propositions may face serious challenges. It could equally be argued that the external material world is not the ultimate reality. Harry Levin in The Gates of Horn deliberately avoids this highly controversial issue by leaving it to epistemologists. Even then, he shows sympathetic consideration for difficulties they might meet with: 'for they too are encumbered by the limitations of language.'⁷⁰

Apart from possible semantic confusions, cultural differences must also be brought into the issue. Raymond Williams observes:

Particular cultures carry particular versions of reality, which they can be said to create, in the sense that cultures carrying different rules create their own worlds which their bearers ordinarily experience.

The point is pursued further:

There is not only variation between cultures, but the individuals who bear these particular rules are capable of altering and extending them, bringing new or modified rules by which an extended or different reality can be experienced.⁷¹

Thus reality varies from culture to culture; within a particular culture it varies from individual to individual; for a particular individual it varies from time to time. It is an erratic flow of experience that can be revealed to, and created by, individuals step by step. It should also be remembered that ever since the time of Plato, there has existed in Western thought the idea of a transcendental or metaphysical reality. Plato's search for truth led him beyond

the changing world of experience to an absolute reality beyond it, which is its ultimate archetype and can be apprehended only by the intelligence rather than the senses, that is, Forms or Ideas. Hegel's 'system', 'the whole', though taking on a more subjective air, can in a sense be regarded as modern versions of Platonic Forms. According to Plato, however hard the artist tries to represent accurately the external world understood by the senses, he is only imitating an imitation. Clearly, Platonic transcendental reality is difficult to approach.⁷² Freud and Jung, on the other hand, would claim that there is a reality beyond one's ordinary sense perception and intelligence – the 'unconscious'. Damian Grant believes that reality can be subjective, therefore indeterminate: 'Reality is not only located in the mind, but is at the mercy of the moods and caprices of the mind, dilates and contracts with the degree of activity of the consciousness.'⁷³

Despite the fact that the realists from Balzac to Zola show considerable concern for social reality, they have often been blamed for being preoccupied with the depiction of external material things solely and have often been called materialists. Duranty, himself as a militant realist theorist, saw in materialism the Achilles's heel of realism.⁷⁴ As the nineteenth century progressed, realism showed an increasing reversion from the objective to the subjective, losing much of its early materialistic momentum. Talking about Bennett's A Man from the North (1898), Joseph Conrad noted in 1902: 'No realism in art will ever reach reality.'⁷⁵ He did not define what this reality was, but the undertone is that it could be something erratic and intangible, not something concrete and substantial as the realists had generally assumed it to be. Arthur Macdowall in 1918 proposed a distinction between two types of realism – one that attends to the outside of things and the other that concerns the inside – and suggests the terms 'external' and 'descriptive' for the former and 'psychological' and 'analytical' for the latter.⁷⁶ For the modern artist, the range of subject matter

for representation has widened; the depth of what it is possible to represent has been increased. He tries to represent the world he knows and lives in from every aspect his intuition, intellect and experience can grasp. He not only claims as material some aspect of the physical world, he also penetrates deep into the recesses of the soul. At a symposium held in 1969 Bernard Bergonzi argued: 'We have no common sense of reality. We are saddled with all kinds of relativistic structures of consciousness.'⁷⁷ It is not surprising that in an era of high-energy physics and molecular biology there is an increasing sense of uncertainty about the substantiality of the physical world. A result of this uncertainty has been an increasing appeal, in the form of modernism, to the subjective, the ego, the inner reality, which was very much the concern of the romantics of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

When realism developed into naturalism, its imitation view of art was somehow denied a theoretical status. Zola violently attacked the tendency to equate naturalism with documentation or photography in 'The Experimental Novel', which first appeared in 1880:

A stupid reproach against us naturalists is that we want solely to be photographers. In vain we declare that we accept temperament, personal expression, people continue to respond with their imbecile argument about the impossibility to be strictly true, about the necessity to arrange facts in order to make up a work of art whatsoever.

He continued to assert the importance of genius and the modifying power of selection in the 'experimental method':

The idea of experiment carries with itself the idea of modification. We certainly start with true facts, which are our indestructible foundation; but, in order to show the mechanism of facts, we need also to demonstrate and manage phenomena; this is our part of invention, of genius in the work.⁷⁸

Clearly, Zola was aware of selection and arrangement as inherent requirements

for any form of art. A vulnerable aspect of early realistic doctrines was a certain degree of indifference towards selection and arrangement, which are indispensable for an adequate formulation of a theory of realism. This to some extent was a result of the realists' assertion that whatever exists is proper material for literary treatment and that art should reproduce reality faithfully and in its totality. Obviously enough, despite his sonorous theorizing about the mimetic nature of art, the realistic novelist, like any other writer, is fascinated only by some aspects of reality. Whether he admits it or not, he selects material from life which interests him, ignores that which does not, and arranges the chosen element to construct a significant whole. He gets to know one thing by observation at the expense of losing sight of another. However wide his interest, the accuracy of his perception in one area is in contrast to the bluntness of his sensibility in another. Bound by criteria of artistic relevance, he has to decide what kind of information, and how much of it, should be included in his work. Not only has he to judge what information to include and what to withhold, but also to decide at what stages of the narrative to disclose information. Above all, in what ways. Even when the notorious 'photograph' metaphor, invariably associated with the theory and practice of the realists, is further pursued to that of 'cinema', it is still the case that what the cinema presents as art is ultimately a product of imagination in the sense that it has undergone a process of selection and arrangement. This is true even of the cinematic art of the most documentary kind.

As Madame Bovary appeared serially in the Revue de Paris in 1856-57, Sainte-Beuve asked the following question:

Why not place in the book one single character whose nature is to console and soothe the reader with a pleasant sight, why not allow him one single friend?... Why not also provide goodness in one figure at least, one charming and venerable face?⁷⁹

It is the same case with many other realists, as Levin rightly points out: 'Wherever realists have attempted the unrestricted reproduction of the ugly or the trivial, traditionalists have reasserted the principles of artistic selection.'⁸⁰ It should be noted, however, that as early as 1854, Champfleury had drawn attention to selection and arrangement as indispensable elements of a theory of realism.⁸¹ More emphatically, Maupassant admitted choice and ordering as necessary for art. He believed that this did not invalidate the basic realistic position. In 'The Lower Elements' which appeared in Le Gaulois, 28 July, 1882, he claimed the 'absolute right of the novelist to choose his subject as he sees fit.'⁸² In the preface to Pierre et Jean (1888), written in September 1888, he conceded that even in realistic writing some selection was necessary and he saw this as the first blow at the theory of the 'whole truth'. For this argument, he offered the following reasons: 'Life is composed of the most different, most unforeseen, most contrary and most disparate things; it is headstrong, without consequences or connection, full of inexplicable, illogical and contradictory catastrophes.' The artist is therefore compelled to choose 'characteristic details' useful for his purpose, and can ignore things that are irrelevant. In his exposition of this point he continued to insist: 'to write the truth, then, consists in presenting a complete illusion of the truth, following the ordinary logic of facts, and not in transcribing them pell-mell in the order of their successive occurrences.'⁸³ While incidentally recognizing the principles of artistic selection and arrangement, these remarks contain a more sophisticated version of the imitation theory of art. The early realists' simplistic view of art as an objective and precise reproduction of life was replaced by the new idea of creating an illusion of reality. Imagination and creation were expressly enlisted for a formulation of a realistic theory, therefore the ultimate subjectiveness lurking in any kind of artistic practice was acknowledged. This notion of the illusiveness of art was shared by the French-oriented Henry

James, although he made no claim to being a realist. His view was metaphorically expressed in his preface to The American (1877):

There is our general sense of the way things happen – it abides with us indefeasibly, as readers of fiction...and there is our particular sense of the way they don't happen, which is liable to wake up unless reflexion and criticism, in us, have been skilfully and successfully drugged. There are drugs enough, clearly – it is all a question of applying them with tact; in which case the way things don't happen may be artfully made to pass for the way things do.⁸⁴.

CHAPTER 2

'DESIRE FOR FRANCE'

Bennett was exposed to foreign influences throughout his artistic career. The chief influences were French and Russian, the French influence being of such overriding importance that it merits examination in some detail. It was mainly from the French realist and naturalist novelists that Bennett learned his aesthetic theories, and he willingly acknowledged this indebtedness. Long after his reputation as a novelist had been established, he recalled his early contact with French thought and ways of life in 'The Desire for France':

I now saw that there has been a French thread through my life. Of its origin I can form no idea... When I was eighteen or nineteen and a clerk in my father's law office in the Five Towns I used to spend my money on French novels in English translation. I had passed the London Matriculation in French... I deeply enjoyed these secret contacts with French thought and manners, as revealed in French novels. The risks I had to run in order to procure them were terrific.¹

At twenty-three or twenty-four, Bennett began to read French novels in the original without a dictionary, and from then on reading French formed an inseparable part of his life:

The first French book I ever read in this way was Daudet's Fromont Jeune et Risler Aîné... Thenceforward I never ceased to read French... I used to buy a French newspaper every day at a shop in Coventry Street.²

This interest in French literature led him to France itself. Bennett paid his first visit to the country in 1897 when he stayed in Paris for one week. There, he went enthusiastically to art galleries, museums, concerts and theatres. He was keenly conscious of the various contrasts between England and France and between London and Paris, yet was unable to grasp the 'great central

difference', because 'the phrase which is to disclose the gulf between the Latin and the Teutonic, eludes and evades the effort of the mind to seize it.'³ The city created in him a strange mixed feeling of admiration and puzzlement, as he wrote on the last day of his visit: 'I left Paris. None of my deepest impressions about it seems to have been set down at all.'⁴ Concerning this feeling, Reginald Pound observes, 'It is as if he had been made painfully aware of his intellectual rawness, as if he had been patronized and was in no position to protest.'⁵ He left Paris, but his awareness of the 'great central difference' between the English and the French persisted for the rest of his life. Writing in June, 1927 about Amiel's journal, while expressing his annoyance at French critics' hostility to this 'amorist' and 'religionist', he criticized certain English characteristics:

The Anglo-Saxon mind, in addition to being hypocritical, Pharisaical, and intellectually dishonest in certain matters, hates to learn the full truth about the men it admires. It knows well enough what human nature is, and will privately admit, with some benevolence, what human nature is; but – never above a whisper.⁶

On July, 1927, he told the readers of the Evening Standard that there were five French novels which he had read three times and that he had read some Hardy and some Moore twice, 'but as for English novels in general, even the master-pieces are rendered insular for me by our racial sentimentality and prudery.'⁷ He lived in France for considerable periods, beginning on 15 March, 1903. Though lonely at first, the isolation was greatly assuaged by his acquaintance with a chorus girl named Chichi, who was frequently at Bennett's flat at 4 Rue de Calais. About this time he and André Gide became friends.⁸ In January 1907, the music critic Calvocoressi introduced Marguerite Soulie to Bennett, who was then in need of secretarial service. This eventually led to their marriage.⁹ On 8 October, 1907, in Fontainebleau, Bennett started writing

his most successful novel The Old Wives' Tale (1908).¹⁰ By 1921, he had stayed in France altogether for over nine years, 'liking and comprehending the French more and more, and feeling more and more at home among them, until now I do believe I have a kind of double mentality – one English and the other French.'¹¹

In How to Become an Author (1903), while criticizing the insularity of English fiction, he prescribed for literary beginners a reading list which was overwhelmingly French – 'the Journal of the Brothers de Goncourt, Guy de Maupassant's essay on Flaubert, Tolstoy's essay on De Maupassant, and the critical work of Ste. Beuve, Anatole France, Jules Lemaitre, Paul Bourget and Comte de Vogue.'¹² The first piece of fiction that Bennett himself wrote at thirteen was a short story about the evil of marrying a drunken woman, a subject taken directly from Zola's L'Assommoir in Vizetelly's translation.¹³ What seems to be the earliest evidence recorded by Bennett himself of his aesthetic apprenticeship to the French is to be found in his letters to George Sturt of 24 May, 1893 and of 24 April, 1894. In the former, he mentions Flaubert, Zola and Maupassant, 'who at all cost aim at an impartial and impersonal presentment of life', and in the latter he writes: 'I am just going up town to get a copy of today's Echo de Paris before it is sold out. A new volume of that remarkable concern, the Journal of the Brothers Goncourt, commences serial issue therein today, and I am anticipating some aesthetic fun.'¹⁴ Later on he made use of ideas taken from Maupassant's Bel-Ami (1885) for his A Man from the North; he modelled Anna of the Five Towns (1902) on Balzac's Eugénie Grandet, and The Old Wives' Tale on Maupassant's Une Vie. French novels were such a lasting influence on him that even after his reputation had been firmly established he wrote in his journal on 22 March, 1910: 'I bought a good edition of Stendhal's L'Amour on the quays and at once took ideas from it for Clayhanger.'¹⁵ His journal entry for 27 February, 1917 reads: 'Last week I

finished reading the Balzac volume containing La Recherche de l'Absolu and La Peau de Chagrin. Both these are very fine indeed'; that for 9 March, 1920 mentions his reading Balzac's Le Cure de Campagne, which would later be made use of for the death-bed scene in Lord Raingo (1926).¹⁷ Even in 1927, towards the end of his career, Maupassant continued to make a strong appeal to him: 'At 5 a. m. (Wednesday) I came down to my study, and smoked a cigarette and got Monsieur Parent to read. Maupassant is still wearing well.'¹⁸

Of the English novelists whom Bennett acknowledged as having a strong influence on him, George Moore deserves the highest status. It was not until he had read Moore's A Mummer's Wife (1885), which is set in the Potteries, that he realized that his native towns, ugly and unpromising as they appeared, could be used as material for fiction. Moore's impact on him was so strong that even in 1910, after he had achieved fame, he noted in his journal that he had 'finished the third or fourth perusal of A Mummer's Wife.'¹⁹ In a letter to Moore of 24 December, 1920, he admitted the profound influence that this novel had had on him and described Moore as the initial inspiration for all his Five Towns stories.²⁰ Moore himself was heavily indebted to the French. From 1873 to 1880, he had lived in Paris studying painting, and during these years he became acquainted with Daudet, Edmond Goncourt, Zola and the Francophile Russian novelist Turgenev.²¹ He came across Zola's 'The Experimental Novel' by chance and immediately fell under the spell of its artistic theories. This obsession was of a quite long duration. During his stay in Paris, Moore also developed an intense interest in Balzac, Flaubert, and the Goncourts. His first published novel A Modern Lover (1883) owes a great deal to his memories of their works. A Mummer's Wife draws much of its subject matter from Madame Bovary and L'Assommoir. It is significant that the only English novelist to whom Bennett confessed an unequivocal debt was strongly French-oriented. When acknowledging to Moore that he was the 'father' of all

his Five Towns fiction, Bennett was in fact admitting his ultimate discipleship to the French realists and naturalists.

So overwhelming was Bennett's early interest in French literature that in one of his early journal entries, while claiming a familiarity with Maupassant and the Goncourts, he mentioned a large number of English authors whom he had 'never even overlooked' and confessed: 'A list of the masterpieces I have *not* read would fill a whole column.'²² In The Truth about an Author (1903) he maintains on the one hand that at twenty-one he 'had read almost nothing of Scott, Jane Austen, Dickens, Thackeray, the Brontës and George Eliot'²³ and on the other that his first novel was written under 'the sweet influences of the de Goncourts, Turgenev, Flaubert, and de Maupassant.'²⁴ Evidence shows that Bennett had read Zola's 'The Experimental Novel' in 1885 when he was eighteen. Thus, even though little was recorded by himself about his aesthetic apprenticeship to the French before 1893, it could nevertheless be assumed that when at twenty-seven he started A Man from the North, eight years of extensive reading in French literature had irreversibly established the direction that he would follow for the rest of his literary career: the novels that he was going to write were to be faithful to reality and concerned with everyday life, as the works of his French masters had been. Even Turgenev, the only Russian novelist whose name appears frequently in Bennett's early correspondence and journal entries, stayed long in Paris in the 1870s and was in close contact with most of the major literary figures there. Like the French-oriented Henry James, Bennett classified him as being French: 'In French fiction I include the work of Turgenev, because I read him always in French translation.'²⁵

By the time Bennett began to be strongly interested in the French realist and naturalist novels, the realist movement in France had lost much of its early momentum and was already being regarded as obsolete. Yet, across the Channel, due to what Bennett often criticized as the insularity of the island

country, England had scarcely been aroused from her own literary tradition which had been of a more conservative nature than that of France. In England, realism as a literary phenomenon had never developed into an independent literary movement. It could hardly be expected that a few Francophiles such as Bennett and Moore would start a campaign to systematically propagandize the realist tenets, particularly when the continuing strength of Victorian moralism is taken into account. Thus, although Bennett was always drawing the attention of the British reading public to French literature, he remained relatively reticent at a theoretical level. Yet there is no doubt that he was a realist, and was well aware of the qualities that he had acquired from his French masters and made himself the type of novelist that he was. In his discussion in 1901 of Moore's A Modern Lover, Bennett considered faithfulness to life an essential characteristic of the book: 'It is written throughout with that religious, punctilious regard for major and minor truth which entitles it to be called "realistic"'.²⁶ Writing on Chekov in 1909 he remarked: 'His climaxes are never strained; nothing is idealized, sentimentalized, etherialized; no part of the truth is left out, no part is exaggerated.'²⁷ These remarks are strikingly reminiscent of the French realists' boisterous insistence in the mid-nineteenth century that art should be an exact reproduction of life. They also apply to Bennett's own literary principles and practice, as will be discussed in detail later.

The much-criticized orientation of the French realists and naturalists towards minute details in description manifests itself in Bennett in a manner which indicates that he is scarcely inferior to his masters. Henry Mynors's pottery works, the parlour and kitchen of the Tellwright household, the draper's shop of the Baineses with its underground kitchen, the printing works of the Clayhangers, Henry Earlforward's bookshop and the grand hotel in Imperial Palace (1930) are all described down to the smallest detail. This

particularization creates a coherent fictional atmosphere that not only provides indispensable background information, but also serves to reflect personality and convey social messages, as will be shown in detail later. The physical appearance of characters is treated with a similar minuteness. Like the French realists and naturalists, Bennett was criticized on the grounds that his attempt to transcribe life in such a way suffocated the imagination, creativeness and the elevating function of art. As that of his forerunners, his work was also assigned labels such as 'photograph', 'catalogue', 'list', 'inventory', 'documentary', 'recording', and 'copying'. A typical case is to be found in George Sturt's letter dated 15 September, 1902 concerning Anna of the Five Towns:

Your people are not quite creations. Instead of writing like God who made them, you write as if you were a recording angel. Consequently your book is a sort of document – a scientific treatise.²⁸

About the Tellwright kitchen in particular:

The kitchen details produce an atmosphere of hum-drum domestic life, continuous through years – not an atmosphere of excitement and thrill and impending change.²⁹

Like the French realists, Bennett too owes much of the authenticity of his work to the method of documentation. Evidence shows that he went back to the Potteries in April 1899 to collect data for Anna and was quite satisfied with the result of his field work. In December 1909 he was again back in the Potteries gathering facts for Clayhanger. He visited his father's friend Joseph Dawson, printer and book-seller, several times, to collect information for the printing-works scene in the novel by making notes. He even took part of the walk that Edwin Clayhanger takes as he comes home from school at the beginning of the story.³⁰ For Darius Clayhanger's childhood he made such

extensive use of When I was a Child that at times he almost plagiarizes the original. For the siege of Paris in The Old Wives' Tale, he did two months' painstaking research, not only reading historical material but also talking with certain old Parisians who had actually experienced the siege. The information required for the execution scene in the novel was derived from a series of articles on execution in Matin.³¹ Inspired by the Goncourts, he kept a journal from 1896 until the last years of his life. Its documentary manner can be seen in the following extracts:

Thomas Arrowsmith called on John Beardmore for a subscription to the Burslem Wesleyan Chapel. Beardmore declined to contribute, and explained how he was losing money on all hands and had in fact had a bad year. He went to such extreme pessimism that Arrowsmith at last interrupted:

'If things are so bad as that, Mr Beardmore,' he said, 'we'll have a word of prayer,' and without an instant of hesitation he fell down on his knees.

Beard began to stamp up and down the room.

'None o' that nonsense,' he shouted. 'None o' that nonsense. Here's a half sovereign for ye.'³²

It was a misty morning, and I walked across the fields behind the house, to see what they looked like in a fog. In the middle of the first big field I gradually descried the bald-headed youth, Giffen, perched on a haystack cutting fodder and dropping it into a cart underneath him... I walked on and came into another large field, that seemed to be too carefully tended to belong to Adam. Only a very narrow path was left under the hedge, and the dogs had to follow me in Indian file. An old man and a boy were ploughing the field.³³

Small incidents, sceneries and dialogues were thus recorded in a plain restrained style for later literary use or as literary exercises. Even though it could be maintained that novelists who have never been considered as realists might have kept a journal too, and for literary purposes, in Bennett's case, the journal was not merely to record facts, as an ordinary diary may do, but to record them faithfully, with great attention accorded to minute details. If Bennett's novels frequently invoke a strong sense of authenticity, it is the

result of his diligent and painstaking labour.

Unlike the early French realists, Bennett was well aware of the fundamental subjectiveness of any form of art. In 1914 he remarked that what is of importance is not the multiplicity of details, but the artistic selection and combination of details to produce a general impression of coherence and probability.³⁴ Since the debate on realism in France had come to an end long before and the theoretical vulnerability of the tenet that art should be a precise reproduction of life had been unanimously acknowledged, Bennett was now in a more advantageous position to defend his artistic performance. Like Zola and Maupassant, he was quite willing to admit the imaginativeness of art. In a letter to Edward Garnett of 23 November, 1908 he says: 'Much of it [The Old Wives' Tale] is very good faking, but it is faking. You are wrong in assuming that Cyril's youth contains reminiscences, except as to stealing money.'³⁵ Again, his journal entry for 22 May, 1921 suggests his firm belief in the imaginativeness of the art of fiction:

He [George Moore] said that Christine was the finest cocotte in English literature, and that I must have lived with her, and actually witnessed the Sunday afternoon kitchen scene, etc. I don't think he believed my denial of this and my statement that it was all invented, including Christine.³⁶

Yet, compared with his French predecessors, Bennett showed an obvious lack of originality and enthusiasm with regard to literary theories. Wherever he touched upon the issue of the imaginative nature of art, his remarks are on the whole fragmentary and incidental.

As regards the question of selection and arrangement as inherent elements of art, Bennett was also in a more advantageous situation than his French forerunners. He had read 'The Experimental Novel' when he was eighteen and had read many of Maupassant's essays on the issue later on. Therefore, when he set out on his literary career, he was theoretically already well-armed, as

the following observation suggests:

What of the actual process of handling the raw material dug out of existence and of the artist's self – the process of transmuting life into art?... there is no conscious process. The convention chosen by an artist is his illusion of the truth. Consequently, the artist only omits, selects and arranges.³⁷

These remarks clearly recall those of Maupassant that are quoted in Chapter 1. Given that realism as a distinct literary trend had already become out-of-date in France, Bennett, with his artistic orientation towards the French, was unlikely to repeat the early realists' mistake, which consists in a certain degree of indifference towards selection and arrangement as essential requirements for any form, or school, of art.

Corresponding to the scientific spirit of their age the French realists put great emphasis on the accurate observation and representation of external phenomena. They tended to attach great importance to the physical side of reality. This aspect of their work is attributable to their materialistic outlook, but the flourishing of visual arts can hardly be ignored as another influence. Realistic paintings, as the dominant school of painting in the mid-nineteenth century, manifested an even stronger commitment to external physical aspects of life than realistic novels. In these circumstances, it was natural that the realist novelists should attempt to convey to the reader the kinds of visual effects that painters employed. Realist and naturalist novels are full of descriptive passages in the manner of painting, frequently in great detail and of great length. This quality also finds its reflection in Bennett. Just as there had been a parallel in France between the rise of the realist novel on the one hand and the advanced visual arts on the other, so Bennett the realist novelist showed a strong interest in visual arts which started in his childhood and persisted throughout his adult life. It is difficult to estimate to what extent this interest contributed to his becoming a realist, but it might not be a mere

coincidence that George Moore, whose literary career too was profoundly influenced by the French, actually studied painting in Paris, and was on close terms with Edouard Manet.³⁸ During his first stay in Paris, Bennett visited the Louvre, the Luxembourg Gallery and the Musée Cluny all in one day in order to pay his eager tribute to the great masters. Later on whenever there was a chance, he went to art galleries and exhibitions. His favourite painters seem to have been Delacroix, Manet, Cezanne and Degas. On one occasion Bennett and Moore lunched together and they talked about Manet.³⁹ The fact that the Goncourt brothers were art historians, connoisseurs and collectors as well as novelists, and that their Parisian scenes are often regarded as prodigious transferences of pictorial technique to literary description is not entirely irrelevant either, as Bennett held them in high esteem throughout his career, never hesitated to acknowledge their influence on him, and even modelled his journal on theirs. With this kind of artistic sensitivity, Bennett always insisted on a distinction between the artistic type of novelist and a mere story-teller. As will later be argued in greater detail, Bennett made conscious efforts to achieve effects of painting in his fiction, in a similar way to that of his French masters, who were either painters like Manet or artist-novelists like the Goncourts.

With regard to the issue concerning social propriety or impropriety, Bennett could be seen as a characteristic English novelist in whom French realism and naturalism met with the more conservative nature of English fiction and arrived at a considerable compromise. The sensations roused by the realist's and naturalist's frank treatment of sexuality were something not to be expected in mid-Victorian England. A strong tradition in English fiction that is represented by a long chain of novelists from Defoe to George Eliot and can be traced to the remote period of Chaucer is the belief that it is a story-teller's obligation to edify and entertain. The novelist was expected to

take a positive moral stand and cogently to convey his moral message to the reader, either through direct preaching or through the story itself. The objective, open attitude towards sexuality that characterized the French realist and naturalist movement was alien to this tradition, as it developed from the late eighteenth century.

There can be little doubt that it was largely the French realists' frank attitude towards sex that initially aroused the young Bennett's interest in them. This attitude persisted throughout his literary career as a principal criterion against which the sincerity and truthfulness, and therefore the essential validity, of a work of art were to be judged. He recalled his early days in December, 1927: 'I had the astounding courage as a "young youth" to order from a friendly bookseller of a conspiratorial turn of mind Zola's The Soil. How the rumours of Zola's daring and originality had penetrated into the central fastnesses of the Five Towns I cannot imagine.'⁴⁰ He could in fact reproach sweepingly generations of Victorian novelists for their evasiveness about sex for the sake of social propriety. In his late years, he constantly asserted that Nana and Cousine Bette were the best novels of their respective authors. He praised Proust and Gide, together with the German novelist Stefan Zweig, for their 'marvellous delicacy and realism' and 'staggering directness' in dealing with homosexuality.⁴¹ Passing Zeus-like judgments on great Victorian novelists, he placed Thackeray above Dickens, presumably because of the former's French experience and of his adventurous inclination towards the delicate issue of sexuality in fiction:

Now Thackeray was very naughty. He had more education and more taste than Dickens. Dickens did not sin against the light. Thackeray did. Vanity Fair is a great novel... But the compromises between falsity and truth which disfigure it, the evasions, the omissions, the shirking of difficulties – these are unworthy of any serious artist, much more of a great artist.⁴²

Thackeray is praised here because he was a bit more adventurous than Dickens. He is also scolded because he was not adventurous enough. To a great extent, the essential artistic value of a novel for Bennett seems to consist in a defying attitude to the conventional morality cherished and guarded by a 'Pharisaical' and 'dishonest' public.

With the impact of French literature in Britain, the old literary notions faced serious challenges. Balzac was translated into English as early as 1834. By the end of the century, virtually all of his writings had been translated and were well-known to the Victorian literary public. Other important French novelists were also being translated. Before 1900 there were altogether nine English publications of Flaubert's works, five translations of the novels of the Goncourt brothers, thirty-five of Daudet, twelve of Maupassant and forty-five of Zola.⁴³ Yet the French novelists were looked upon by Victorian England with mixed feelings of antagonism and admiration. Although there was a great demand for French fiction, which was being met by translation after translation, it was greeted by an outburst of hostile criticism that culminated in the late 1880s in the indictment and imprisonment of Henry Vizetelly for publishing 'obscene' literature.⁴⁴ It was in such circumstances that the French-orientated Bennett began to challenge, even if rather tentatively, moral and literary conventions in the first decade of the twentieth century. Although there had been some degree of frankness towards sexuality in some British novelists, public opinion was largely hostile to it. It still required considerable boldness on the part of the writer to treat the issue openly.

Bennett's commitment to the French is such that it frequently extended into an unmistakable imitateness, as can be seen from the fact that he not only modelled his journal on that of the Goncourts, but also made an effort to photographically record his mother's death in much the same way as Edmond Goncourt had photographically recorded his brother Jules's death. Edmond

Goncourt's journal reads:

I listened to his gasping breath. In the shadow of the curtains I have his fixed eyes stare before me. Every now and then his arm comes out of the bed-clothes and brushes against me, while unintelligible words are broken and aborted in his mouth. Over the tall, black trees and through the open windows, the electric whiteness of a ballad-singer's moon falls across the floor... He cannot sleep a minute and his head tosses incessantly on his pillow from side to side, noisy with all the stupid din of a paralysed brain and sending out through the corners of his mouth embryonic phrases, truncated words, half-formulated syllables, which he begins by repeating angrily and which finally die away in a sigh. In the distance I can hear distinctly the eerie howling of a dog.⁴⁵

That of Bennett:

She looked very small, especially her head in the hollow of the pillows. The outlines of her face very sharp; breathed with her mouth open, and much rumour of breath in her body; her nose was more hooked, had in fact become hooked. Scanty hair. She had a very weak, self-pitying voice, but with sudden outbursts of a strong voice, imperatively, and flinging out of arms. She still had a great deal of strength. She forgot most times in the middle of a sentence, and it took her a long time to recall.⁴⁶

Despite a greater degree on the part of Edmond Goncourt of indulgence in detail and a wilful juxtaposition of the death scene with descriptions of a nonchalant moon and the weird howling of a dog to emphasize the absence of moral associations, the passages nevertheless reveal considerable resemblance in spirit between the two writers. Bennett's description is just as detached and unimpassioned as Edmond Goncourt's. The intention to present death as a simple fact, dissociated from its social significance, with all its external physical manifestations specified, is equally strong in both writers. Jules Goncourt died in 1870; Bennett's mother in 1914. Forty-four years passed between the two events. That elapse of time, with all its changes in literary trends, did little to extenuate the stimulating effect for Bennett of the French realists' literary practice.

Another aspect of Bennett's imitateness is to be found in his penchant for disease and sick-beds. There is evidence that early in 1895-96 Bennett was reading Renée Mauperin, Germinie Lacerteux, Madame Gervaisais and L'Assommoir. The French novelists' orientation towards diseases was quickly and energetically echoed in his first novel A Man from the North. Thenceforward, he dealt with a great variety of diseases in his novels, as will be shown in greater detail in a later chapter. His obsession with illness is not accidental. From his first novel to Lord Raingo late in his career, there is remarkable consistency with regard to this passion, which was originally cultivated by his reading chiefly of the Goncourts and to a lesser extent, of Zola and Maupassant. The leaning towards morbidity manifest in some French realists and naturalists has been severely attacked by critics and has been regarded as atypical of realism as a distinct artistic school. Yet Bennett, in his earnest discipleship to the French, indiscriminately picked up this disposition and, with great gusto, transplanted it to English fiction. Indeed, in this area, he followed his predecessors more closely than in any other aspect of their work.

A third aspect of Bennett's dependence on the French can be seen in his large-scale borrowing from the French realists for his major works. Of this Louis Tillier has made a fairly adequate study. Admittedly, the main themes of Bel-Ami and A Man from the North are similar. The similarity is such that, as Tillier points out, it 'led Bennett unwittingly to imitate incidents or details.'⁴⁷ With considerable tenability, Tillier pinpoints a multitude of parallels between the incidents - many of them trifling - of the two novels.⁴⁸ However, while emphasizing Bennett's undeniable discipleship to the French, Tillier also tends to extenuate his imitateness: 'Striking though [the resemblances] are, they do not bulk large in the novel as a whole; compared with personal memories, these unconscious borrowings are but a small part of the material used by the author's imagination.'⁴⁹

Tillier's study of Anna's debt to Eugénie Grandet is equally thorough-going and tenable. He draws attention to the similarities between the two plots and the obvious parallelism between the two sets of *dramatis personae*: Eugénie-Anna, Grandet-Tellwright, Charles-Willie, De Bonfons-Mynors and Mme Grandet-Agnes. He rightly points out that Bennett's consistent use of Anna's point of view provides an explanation as to why Willie Price plays a smaller part than his French counterpart Charles, and why Mynors is such a prominent figure throughout Anna, in striking contrast to the general inconspicuousness of the Cruchot-Grassin coterie.⁵⁰ Yet Tillier fails to notice the intricacy of Bennett's cross-Channel transplantation of the Eugénie-Charles-De Bonfons triangular relationship. With a juggle, Bennett transfers some elements of the Eugénie-Charles relationship into the Anna-Mynors relationship, or to put it in another way, he assigned the role played by Charles in the French novel to two English characters: Mynors and Willie. Nor does Tillier draw sufficient attention to the fact that De Bonfons plays a far less important role than his English counterpart Mynors, who figures throughout Anna as a highly functional character, and as an all-important element in conveying the novel's main moral message. However, Tillier is undoubtedly correct in pointing out the unusual imitateness of Anna: 'Bennett never came so near to appropriating the whole framework of an earlier story.'⁵¹

Concerning The Old Wives' Tale Tillier draws attention to the possible influences of Huysmans's Les Soeurs Vatard on Bennett's conception of the different personalities of the Baines sisters. He reports favourably George Lafourcade's discovery of the high possibility that The Old Wives' Tale owes a debt to Balzac's Maison du Chat qui Pelot.⁵² As to the generally acknowledged indebtedness of The Old Wives' Tale to Une Vie, Tillier maintains: 'In fact, Bennett hardly found more in Une Vie than a challenge to stimulate his

ambition. His aim was to equal, and if possible excel Maupassant; but he nowhere borrowed from him material for his own novel.⁵³ Unlike the Bel-Ami/A Man from the North and Eugénie Grandet/Anna cases, Tillier admits virtually no parallel between Une Vie and The Old Wives' Tale. He dismisses the theme of resignation to fate as being 'too common-place to be considered... as having been "borrowed" by the English from the French novel.'⁵⁴ There is an obvious disparity between Tillier's reluctance to acknowledge the similarity that could be established between Une Vie and The Old Wives' Tale, and his vigorously meticulous efforts to pinpoint the numerous resemblances between the other two sets of novels. Apart from the fact, which Tillier does point out but dismisses as 'inconclusive', that both Jeane and Constance spoil their sons and both later on have to swallow the bitter fruit of their maternal indulgence, an incident concerning the Jeane-Julien relationship can find a ready counterpart in the Sophia-Scales relationship. Before Jeane and Julien go to Corsica for their honeymoon, Jeane's mother the Baroness gives two thousand francs to her daughter for her 'little extravagances as a bride'.⁵⁵ From this incident Sophia's filching a bank-note for one hundred pounds from her aunt before she elopes to Paris with Scales might well have sprung. Subsequently, almost all of Jeane's private money goes to Julien, much to her humiliation, but Sophia's one-hundred-pound private fund proves of vital importance to the maintenance of her dignity and survival in a tough foreign world. The difference seems to belittle the resemblance between the two incidents. Yet it is highly possible that Bennett originally took the idea from Une Vie, since he initially intended The Old Wives' Tale to be the 'English Une Vie, and to "go one better" ' than the French novel.⁵⁶ Tillier also fails to notice the all too obvious link between Julien's crude and scandalous infidelity to Jeane, and Scales's rascality and dissoluteness, and his abandonment of Sophia in Paris.

Even the dogs in both novels serve similar symbolic functions as the empathetic reinforcement of such themes as the banality of daily human existence, the pathos of growing old and the tragedy of death. Both of her parents dead, most of the family fortune spent, her beloved son Paul nowhere to be found, Jeane the aristocratic lady, now only 'the Mad Woman', is treated by the neighbouring farmers with a minimum of respect. At this stage of the novel, Maupassant significantly gives a pathetic description of the ancient, blind and paralyzed dog:

She [Jeane] went by chance into the stable. A growl made her start; it was Murder, whom she had entirely forgotten for two months. Blind and paralyzed, having reached an age which dogs of his breed seldom attain, he lived on a bed of straw, looked after by Ludivine, who never forgot him. Jeane picked him up, fondled him and carried him into the house. Fat as a barrel, he could hardly drag himself about. His legs were straddling and stiff, and he barked like the toy wooden dogs which children play with.⁵⁷

The older generation of the Baineses all dead, Samuel Povey dead, Scales dead, Sophia dead and lastly, Constance dead, Bennett rounds off his massive chronicle of two women's lives with a wilfully detached but even more significant depiction of the old infirm Fossette:

When the short funeral procession started, Mary and the infirm Fossette (sole relic of the connection between the Baines family and Paris) were left alone in the house. The tearful servant prepared the dog's dinner and laid it before her in the customary soup-plate in the customary corner. Fossette sniffed at it, and then walked away and lay down with a dog's sigh in front of the kitchen fire. She had been deranged in her habits that day: she was conscious of neglect, due to events which passed her comprehension. And she did not like it. She was hurt, and her appetite was hurt. However, after a few minutes, she began to reconsider the matter. She glanced at the soup-plate, and, on the chance that it might after all contain something worth inspection, she awkwardly balanced herself on her old legs and went to it again.⁵⁸

Even the tooth scene in The Old Wives' Tale may have its origins in Une Vie,

at the outset of which there is a description of the Des Vauds family travelling in their carriage, the husband making fun of the wife:

The Baroness gradually went off to sleep; her face, framed by six plaits hanging down, slowly dropped, insufficiently supported by the three great waves of her neck, whose last curves were lost in the ocean of her breast. Her head rose and fell with each breath and her cheeks puffed out, as a loud snore issued from her half-open lips. Her husband leant over towards her and gently placed in her hands, which were crossed on the ample curves of her stomach, a small leather wallet. The touch woke her up and she looked down at it, puzzled, with the dazed glance of one just waking up. The wallet fell down and opened; gold and bank notes were scattered all over the floor. This woke her up completely and her daughter's amusement expressed itself in a burst of laughter.⁶¹

The corresponding incident in The Old Wives' Tale is that Samuel Povey, the employee of the Baines shop, has been suffering from a decayed tooth; he falls asleep in a chair; and the two Baines sisters are engaged in a practical joke at his expense:

Mr Povey was certainly asleep, and his mouth was very wide open – like a shop-door. The only question was whether he was not out of his pain for ever.

Then he snored – horribly; his snore seemed a portent of disaster.

Sophia approached him as though he were a bomb, and stared, growing bolder, into his mouth.

'Oh, Con,' she summoned her sister, 'do come and look! It's too droll!'

In an instant all their four eyes were exploring the singular landscape of Mr Povey's mouth. In a corner, to the right of that interior, was one sizable fragment of a tooth, attached to Mr Povey by the slenderest tie, so that at each aspiration of Mr Povey, when his body slightly heaved and the gale moaned in the cavern, this tooth moved separately, showing that its long connection with Mr Povey was drawing to a close...

Constance heard the well-known click of the little tool-drawer, and then she saw Sophia nearing Mr Povey's mouth with the pliers.

'Sophia!' she exclaimed, aghast. 'What in the name of goodness are you doing?'

'Nothing,' said Sophia.

The next instant Mr Povey sprang up out of his laudanum dream.

'It jumps!' he muttered; and after a reflective pause,

'but it's much better.'⁶⁰

Both incidents are of practical jokes, though that in Une Vie is much more mild. Both incidents involve an innocent and funny figure as the victim. Both figures are victimized while sleeping, and the manner in which they sleep is given a meticulous portrayal. Both characters are awakened by the trick, although that in The Old Wives' Tale is much more violent. Both scenes involve two practical jokers respectively, one being active and the other passive. It could be argued that Jeane does not actually participate in the joke. But she is at any rate a witness to the scene and she greatly enjoys the effect of the joke – she is merely more passive than Constance. Thus, it is highly possible that Bennett might have taken the original idea for his tooth scene from the French novel. He greatly expanded it, and made it into a much more vivacious episode than its French prototype. As in the case of the dogs, he did 'go one better' than Maupassant. However, despite the improvement, the ultimate merit of originality – originality in its most strict sense – should go to the French novelist.

In his account of Bennett's inclination to dwell on the sombreness, shabbiness and depression of the physical milieu of his fictional world, Walter Wright argues: 'Bennett did not have to imitate the French naturalists in this; he gravitated towards the depressing and only by an effort drew back.'⁶¹ Since Wright does not provide an explanation of why Bennett 'gravitated towards the depressing', his point would seem irrelevant. To deliberately ignore Bennett's indebtedness to the French realists for the sake of emphasizing other aspects of him would make the study inadequate. Another point made by Wright in connection with the Clayhanger trilogy also needs to be clarified: The Journal reveals his frequent restlessness because his own apartment or house was uncongenial, and the novels have much on the darkness, the cold, the



oppressive emptiness of houses.⁶² It is precisely in Clayhanger, which was written in 1909–10, after The Old Wives' Tale had made Bennett famous and able to live in comfort, that this tendency manifested itself most strongly, as will be shown in detail later.

The propensity to undervalue French influences on Bennett is also apparent in Thomas J. Roberts's study. In his thesis, Roberts attributes Bennett's leaning towards disease to the impact of his grandfather's death on his childhood psyche.⁶³ As a matter of fact, Roberts's whole argument is characterized by a consistent avoidance of French realism, which surely renders his study inadequate. One does not have to build up a peremptory link between Bennett and the French realists, yet few of Bennett's critics, no matter from what point of view they begin their argument, have ignored his French commitment. Roberts's argument would seem even more inadequate when the fact is taken into consideration that his study is an evaluation of Bennett's reputation from 1908, when The Old Wives' Tale was published, to 1958, when the thesis was written. Bennett's reputation declined immediately after his death in 1931. It has not revived substantially since. This can be ascribed to differences in national temperament and in literary perception. Like Moore, Bennett made vigorous endeavours to transplant the spirit and methods of an alien literature to his own country. His effort largely failed. In this connection, his imitativeness was undoubtedly damaging to his reputation. He had other limitations as well. These explain the moderation of his achievement – moderation seen by the standard of the present time, and the relative oblivion of his figure amidst the multitude of outstanding writers who emerged slightly later. Yet his unusually strong commitment to the French realists and naturalists is beyond any doubt. Equally unusual is the consistency of this commitment – from his adolescence right up to his death. Even the immediate cause of his death throws light upon his exceptional passion for France. In

January, 1931, the Bennett's went to France to visit a friend. Despite constant warnings of the danger of typhoid, Bennett defiantly drank from a carafe of tap water, since 'nothing is so insular and absurd as to suppose that the ordinary water of Paris, and indeed, of France, was dangerous.'⁶⁴ Dorothy Bennett, his second wife, tried to dissuade him from drinking the water, but in vain. Bennett was infected with typhoid, and died of it in London two months later.⁶⁵

A similar symbolic finality is observable in the comments he made on the French novelist Colette's The Gentle Libertine just before he made that last journey:

The opening scenes, of the home life of a girl of fourteen who had a secret passion for the genus *apache*, are the best; they are exquisite. The 'freedom' is purely sexual. Several of the 'lingeries' chapters are meet to be called 'daring'. They do not read comfortably in English. Which remark is less of reproach than of a warning to the unwary. Colette, a truly first-rate artist, is French. Her own tongue suits her best. And there you are!⁶⁶

Here is an epitomization of Bennett's life-long 'desire for France'. It started with his being attracted by the 'daring' literature of that country, and was marked by a long-term sensitivity towards differences in national character between the English and the French. Above all, and characteristically enough, here is his hearty cry of admiration - 'there you are!' It is an unreserved expression of the profound love, unique in the history of English fiction, of an English novelist of notable stature for a foreign literature.

CHAPTER 3

A PERVASIVE GLOOM

A salient feature of French realism and naturalism is their pessimistic doctrine of the hereditary and environmental determination of individual character. In French fiction, characters suffer and degenerate into oblivion, decay and ultimate extinction not necessarily because of their personal faults or wrong-doings but largely because of the adverse circumstances in which they are born and brought up. Realism in its strict French sense had become 'diluted' by the time Bennett was acting as its spokesman in Britain, and his response to this aspect of it was only lukewarm.¹ Yet it is unmistakably there, though with environmental forces more tangibly at work than the hereditary elements, which are vital to the shaping of individuals' destiny in such naturalists as Zola.

The point where Bennett arrives nearest to the French naturalists' notion of hereditary determination is to be found towards the end of A Man from the North:

He [Richard Larch] recognized that, while he bore 'all the aspect of prosperity, he had failed. Why had nature deprived him of strength of purpose? Why could not he, like other men, bend circumstances to his own ends? He sought for a reason, and he found it in his father, that mysterious, dead transmittor of traits, of whom he knew so little, and on whose name lay a blot of some kind which was hidden from him. He had been born in shadow, and after a fitful struggle towards emergence into the shadow he must again retire.²

Although Larch's parentage is given only a vague account (his sister Mary, who has virtually functioned as his parent in bringing him up, is said to keep the subject at a distance), it requires no effort here to pinpoint the naturalistic influence on Bennett. This is in fact the only point in all of his fiction where a character's failure in life is explicitly attributed to the workings of biological

forces. Although the novel was published in February 1898, it had been finished by May 1896, when Bennett was most strongly under the spell of the French realists and naturalists. He never again showed such unequivocal commitment to the French doctrine. Indeed, his journal entry for January 3rd, 1899 suggests that he even seemed to be breaking away from the realist school: 'The day of my enthusiasm for "realism", for "naturalism", has passed. I can perceive that a modern work of fiction dealing with modern life may ignore realism and yet be great.'³ Bennett's later career, however, shows that he remained fundamentally a realist, but his youthful gusto for the sweeping scientific claim of the naturalists soon disappeared.

Whereas hereditary determination is reduced to an insignificant proportion and status in Bennett, a sense of repression and frustration arising out of social circumstances which individuals feel and experience, try to escape, but eventually fail to escape, pervades almost all of his serious fiction. So much so, that it can safely be said that it is a dominant feature in Bennett. It will be assumed that in his social world, which consists largely of lower-middle-class personages, repression and frustration are not a substantial repetition of the French realists' doctrine of hereditary and environmental determination, but a partial derivation and a weak echo of it. It will also be shown that this sense of repression and frustration provides Bennett with a theme on which he plays many variations.

In Bennett's fiction, that which deals with the Potteries in particular, there is a consistent social atmosphere which is grim and stern; which acts adversely upon individuals; against which they have to wage a perpetual struggle if they are to rise above it; and from which few really succeed in escaping. The most conspicuous factors emerging from the Five Towns social environment as seen through Bennett's eyes are its narrow self-centredness, puritanical rigidity due to Wesleyan Methodism, and a related money worship.

In almost all of his Five Towns novels, Bennett maintains a critical attitude towards provincialism. He informally defines it in 'The Provincial Woman' as an undue absorption in the immediate accustomed environment and a hostility towards everything beyond it.⁴ This aspect of Five Towns mentality is bitterly and ironically commented upon through the symbolic account of the horse-drawn tram-cars in The Old Wives' Tale:

The driver rang a huge bell, five minutes before starting...and then after deliberations and hesitations, rolled off on its rails into unknown danger while passengers shouted good-bye... After half an hour's perilous transit the car drew up solemnly in a narrow street by the *Signal* office in Hanbridge and the ruddy driver, having revolved many times the polished iron handle of his sole brake, turned his attention to his passengers in calm triumph, dismissing them with a sort of unsung doxology. And this was regarded as the last word of traction! A whipping cracking boy on a tip horse! Oh blind! blind! You could not foresee the hundred and twenty electric cars that now rush madly bumping and thundering at twenty miles an hour through all the main streets of the district.⁵

For Bennett, the Potteries' resistance to progress was also epitomized by the fact that in the eighteenth century the district tried to reject the canal and that in the early nineteenth century it 'succeeded in forcing the greatest railway line in England to run through the unpopulated country five miles off instead of through the Five Towns.'⁶ The Potteries was only one district of Staffordshire and Staffordshire in turn was only one district of England. Yet: 'It ignores the county save that it uses it nonchalantly sometimes as a leg stretcher on holiday afternoons.'⁷ Furthermore, each of the six towns of the Potteries was itself unusually self-centred. Facing the necessity of unification, each refused to recognize the authority of the other five towns. Bennett noted satirically in 1907: 'We pretend that we are six towns... we have six town halls... six everything, including six jealousies.'⁸ Though a form of federation was introduced into the six towns in 1909, evidence shows that the strong egotism of each survived well into 1960s.⁹ The self-centredness of the

Potteries was such that it created an 'excessively irksome' intellectual and artistic environment from which Bennett had to escape.¹⁰ Even at the age of fifty-seven, he wrote in his Journal: 'I took the 12.5 back to London, which went through the Potteries. The sight of the district gave me a shudder.'¹¹ He never felt any deep personal affinity with the region throughout his life.

Another important factor, very much alive in Bennett's day, was Wesleyan Methodism, which he introduces into almost all of his major Five Towns novels and to which he remained bitterly hostile throughout his literary career. Methodism's moral teaching of thrift, industriousness, sobriety and prudence produced an austere social effect, which is shown to account for a great deal of the repression and frustration that prevail in Bennett's Five Towns fiction.

The morality of diligence and frugality naturally gives justification to the pursuit of riches. Wesleyan Methodists in Bennett are dominated alike by the passion for getting money and by the necessity for seeing all things in their cash equivalents. In Anna, the mercilessness of his fellow Methodists in financial dealings drives Titus Price to suicide. Clara Hamps in the Clayhanger trilogy never forgets her prayers, never misses a chapel meeting, is perpetually urging her nephew and nieces not to neglect the Bible, yet feeds her servant on dripping. The passion for hoarding money makes James Ollerenshaw of Helen with the High Hand (1910) astounded when Helen, his step niece, uses four eggs to make him an omelette, despite the fact that he possesses a fortune of nine thousand pounds. In Riceman Steps, a London novel full of Five Towns spirit, Henry Earlfoward's monstrous miserliness controls his entire life and eventually leads to the tragic destruction of both himself and his wife.

Provincialism, Wesleyan Methodism, and money worship are then three major factors in the social life of the Five Towns. One of the results of their joint action is a restraining domestic atmosphere with the older generation

exercising a domineering control over the younger. In fact, the three major social factors are mainly manifest in parental domination. A repressive and frustrating domestic atmosphere, which both embodies and reflects a narrow social atmosphere, constitutes one of Bennett's favourite Five Towns theme. The realist-naturalist tenet of environmental determination of individual character finds its partial expression in Bennett frequently at this level.

In such a grey and sinister social environment, a general sense of repression is inevitable. It is perfectly matched by, and reflected in, an equally grey and sinister physical milieu, as in the cases of Tellwright's parlour, the Prices' house, the Baineses' kitchen, the Clayhangers' sitting-room, Hilda Lessways's boarding-house in Brighton. This repressiveness of the physical milieu is not confined to the Five Towns novels. Larch's lodging in London and the Earlfowards' bookshop are equally dark and melancholy. Like Bennett's characters, those in Gissing and Moore's fiction also lead lives of futility and failure, yet Bennett is more consistent than either in constructing a gloomy, physically oppressive fictional milieu. Bennett's inclination becomes more significant when it is taken into consideration that Gissing was largely concerned with the poverty-stricken urban lower classes, and that Moore had an even stronger commitment to the French than Bennett, if French influences can be seen as responsible for such a leaning. In this respect, Bennett is on a par with Balzac and Zola. There is no such similar consistency in Flaubert, or Maupassant. This tendency of Bennett can be ascribed to his early reading of L'Assommoir, Eugénie Grandet and Père Goriot as well as to the puritanical atmosphere of the Potteries. Yet there can be discerned in some of his work a certain degree of perverse indulgence in physical unpleasantness for its own sake. This is best exemplified by Clayhanger, which contains detailed negative descriptions of the dwelling places of three middle-class figures in quite different circumstances. The sitting-room of the reasonably well-to-do Darius

Clayhanger, who owns a printing-shop, is depicted as dimly-lit and uncomfortable:

Owing to its northern aspect it scarcely ever saw the sun. The furniture followed the universal fashion of horse-hair, mahogany, and wool embroidery. There was a piano, with a high back - fretted wood over silk pleated in rays from the centre; a bookcase whose lower part was a cupboard; a sofa; and a large leather easy-chair which did not match the rest of the room... At night the light fell a little awkwardly from the central chandelier, and Mr Clayhanger, if he happened to be reading, would continually shift his chair an inch or two to left or right, backwards or forwards, and would also continually glance up at the chandelier, as if accusing it of not doing its best.¹²

The boarding-house of Hilda Lessways in Brighton conveys disorder, sombreness and a pathetic lack of colour:

It was shabby. All its tints had merged by use and by time into one tint, nondescript and unpleasant, in which yellow prospered. The drawing-room...was a heaped, confused mass of chairs, sofas, small tables... There was no peace in it for the eye, neither on the walls nor on the floor. The gaze was driven from one ugliness to another without rest. The fireplace was draped...and none of the dark suspicious stuffs showed a clear pattern. The faded chairs were hidden by faded antimacassars; the little futile tables concealed their rickets under vague needlework... At the windows hung heavy dark curtains from great rings that gleamed gilt near the ceiling; and lest the light which they admitted should be too powerful it was further screened by greyish white curtains within them. The carpet was covered in most places by small rugs or bits of other carpets, and in the deep shadows beneath sofas and chairs and behind the piano it seemed to slip altogether out of existence into dark nothingness.¹³

The drawing-room of the Orgreaves, whom Bennett presents as embodying for Edwin Clayhanger an enlightened way of living in the general puritanical joylessness of the Five Towns, seems to be a symbol of opulence:

Although there were in it two unoccupied expanses of carpet, it nevertheless contained what seemed to Edwin immense quantities of furniture of all sorts. Easy-chairs were common, and everywhere... two mirrors, two clocks, two sets of ornaments, and two embroidered screens. The general effect was of extraordinary lavish profusion - of wilful splendid,

careless extravagance.¹⁴

Though the portrayal is largely in a positive light, the last sentence already strikes an unmistakable negative note. In the immediate context the essential shabbiness of the room is neatly brought out: 'Yet the arm of the sofa on which Edwin leaned was threadbare in two different places. The room was faded and worn, like its mistress.'¹⁵

Thus, this consistency in maintaining a sense of physical discomfort manifests itself not only through the entire span of Bennett's career, but also, more conspicuously and more concentratedly, in one single work. If the shabbiness of Hilda Lessways's boarding-house can be given a substantial explanation by her relative poverty in the struggle to maintain respectability after her disastrous marriage to George Cannon, the discomfort of the printing-works owner Darius Clayhanger's parlour can be accounted for only in less direct terms: the puritanical pressure of the Five Towns. However, the drawing-room of the Orgreaves too is described as in a disagreeable condition. A reason for this can be provided by Bennett's intention to present the Orgreave household as declining from opulence to ultimate bankruptcy in These Twain (1916). Yet the consistency with which the interiors that are given a substantial description in this single novel are all presented as sombre and gloomy can probably be accounted for by a subconscious urge on the part of the author, which had sprung from variegated influences, to see and show things as essentially dark and melancholy.

However, this repressive physical ambience is integrated in, and an expression of, the social atmosphere. It is the social environment that fundamentally determines an individual's character and fate. In Anna, the rigid social atmosphere of Bursley is directly mirrored in the desolation, drabness and tension of a street:

Men and women and boys and girls were on their way to work, with hurried clattering steps, some munching thick pieces of bread as they went, all self-centred, apparently morose, and not quite awake. The dust lay thick in the arid gutters, and in drifts across the pavement, as the night-wind had blown it... and though the footpaths were busy the street had a deserted and forlorn aspect... All seemed callous – hoggishly careless of the everlasting verities.¹⁶

Human relationships are completely dominated by cash and the laws of the jungle apply well to the industrialized Bursley. The financial despot Richard Lovatt exercises such a venomous dictatorship over the small businessmen that he is 'set far above hatred'.¹⁷ The financial dealings between Price and Tellwright are marked by a total lack of human sympathy. Price's works is owned by Tellwright. It is in such a forlorn state that 'its faults defied improvement.'¹⁸ Price is bound to it because of arrears of rent; Tellwright is unwilling to sell it because of the same rent. Tellwright presses for payment of arrears even though he is aware that he is unlikely to get them, because 'his policy was to squeeze the last penny out of Price without forcing him into bankruptcy.'¹⁹

The religious fanaticism of the Wesleyan Methodists is such that Anna Tellwright, overpowered, 'reclected all her sins individually – lies, sloth, envy, vanity, even theft in her infancy. She heaped up all the wickedness of a lifetime, hysterically augmented it, and found a horrid pleasure in the exaggeration. Her virtuous acts shrank into nothingness.'²⁰ Sarah Vodrey's whole life is consumed by her religious fever and her slavery in service to the Price family, yet she dies an intensely pathetic death: 'After fifty years of ceaseless labour, she had gained the affection of one person [Anna], and enough money to pay for her funeral.'²¹ The entertainment of children is appropriated and monopolized by Methodist authority, and is organized in a deplorably old-fashioned way:

The smaller children consented to be amused according to the recipes appointed by long customs for school-treats.' Many round-games, which invariably comprised singing or kissing, being thus annually resuscitated by elderly people from the deeps of memory, were preserved for a posterity which otherwise would never have known them.²²

For women, the social, religious and moral patternings of the Five Towns is particularly oppressive. When Tellwright discovers that Anna has been seeing Willie Price, Bennett remarks: 'The miser was wounded in the one spot where there remained to him any sentiment capable of being wounded: his faith in the irreproachable, absolute chastity, in thought and deed, of his woman-kind.'²³

The general social atmosphere of the Five Towns reflected at a domestic level can be seen in Tellwright's tyranny over his children. Anna's personality, characterized by passivity, is in strict correspondence with the oppressiveness of the Five Towns social ambience. Although the literary prototype of Anna can be traced to Eugenie Grandet and the notion of resignation to fate is attributable to ancient philosophers, it is clearly Bennett's intention to present Anna as a victim of the Five Towns. At an early stage of the novel, Bennett remarks:

Enthralled by austere traditions and that stern conscience of hers, she had never permitted herself to dream of the possibility of an escape from the paternal servitude. She had never looked beyond the horizons of her present world, but had sought spiritual satisfaction in the ideas of duty and sacrifice.²⁴

With the development of the story, Anna is stimulated into a kind of spiritual and emotional awakening: she is shown to be capable of revolting against her father's tyranny by destroying the Prices' forged cheque. Yet her awakening is far from complete. Her fundamental passivity dominates her whole person. She yields to convention and marries Henry Mynors instead of Willie Price whom she really loves. She is under the spell of 'sin', duty and 'salvation'; 'she had

sucked in with her mother's milk the profound truth that a woman's life is always a renunciation, greater or less.'²⁵ Bennett rounds off his study of Anna by indicating the determined nature of her martyrdom-like renouncement: 'Facing the future calmly and genially, she took the oath with herself to be a good wife to the man, whom, with all his excellences, she had never loved.'²⁶ She is thus a failure, a victim of circumstances.

If Anna turns out to be a failure in the sense that she tragically accepts a future of lovelessness and futility, Willie Price is unmistakably intended to be a pathetic prey to the cruel materialism of the Five Towns environment. He is presented as a defenceless innocent sufferer who has to bear the humiliation of being the son of a bankrupt and swindler. The burden proves too heavy for him. In spite of Anna's sympathy and financial help, he commits suicide at the end of the story, thereby culminating the tragedy of the Price household, in which there have already occurred two deaths.

The Old Wives' Tale is placed in the same social milieu. When trade is bad, destitution abroad, and the 'priceless employee' of the Baines shop Samuel Povey is doing his utmost for its welfare by making his own shop-tickets, what he receives from Mrs Baines is utter incomprehension:

'What's this?' asked Mrs Baines sharply, bringing her vast form to the table and picking up a ticket.

Povey said nothing. Constance said, 'Mr Povey thought of it today. Don't you think it's very good Mother?'

'I'm afraid I don't,' Mrs Baines coldly replied...

She dropped the ticket from her gloved hand. Mr Povey had darkly blushed. On this occasion he said nothing. He expressed his feeling by seizing the ticket and throwing it into the fire.²⁷

What lies behind her objection is the fact that she is comfortably accustomed to the tickets of Mr Chawner, the whole-sale stationer who supplies all the Five Towns with shop tickets. She is utterly blind to any prospect of her shop benefiting from even this minor innovation.

The central figure of the Clayhanger trilogy Edwin Clayhanger is shown at the opening of the first novel to be diffident and shy. Bennett remarks that 'the sentiment of nature had never been encouraged in him, or even mentioned.'²⁸ His father Darius is said to be 'an average upright and respectable parent' and to have 'enjoyed success with dogs through treating them as individuals,' yet 'it had not happened to him, or to anybody in authority, to treat Edwin as an individual.'²⁹ Thus Edwin's sexual awakening occurs at a very late period. Up to twenty-three, his most notable erotic experience seems to have been watching the clog-dancing given by Florence Simcox at a public house. When he visits the Orgreave household for the first time, he feels awed and ashamed by their easy manners and their enlightened way of life. When Janet Orgreave enters the Clayhanger shop with the intention of speaking to him, he is shown to be ridiculously timorous. During their conversation, he stands awkwardly on one leg all the time.

As in Anna, the children in Clayhanger have no access to proper entertainment either. They are deprived of their weekends by the Wesleyan Methodist Church, the ally of their narrow-minded parents. They are forced to attend not only the Sunday School, but also the Saturday Afternoon Bible Class. Edwin's hatred of these things is such that it survives well into his mature adulthood. In These Twain, he is said to have born a 'tremendous grudge' against Mr Peartree, the Wesleyan minister who was responsible for the Saturday Afternoon Bible Class, for more than twenty years, to have 'execrated, anathematized, and utterly excommunicated Mr Peartree,' and to have 'extended the fearful curse to his family, all his ancestors, and all his descendents.'³⁰

Similar to the cases of Anna and The Old Wives' Tale, this repressiveness often manifests itself at a domestic level. When Edwin, leaving school, is being bullied by Darius for his defeat in the examination by Charlie Orgreave, Mrs

Hamps, his aunt, jumps at this chance of exhibiting her religious convictions:

'But it's all for the best!' she broke forth in a new brave tone. 'Everything is ordered for the best. We must never forget that! And I'm sure that Edwin will be a great credit to us all, with the help from above.' She proceeded powerfully in this strain. She brought forth God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit. She mentioned the dangers of the world, and the disguises of the devil, and the unspeakable advantages of a good home.³¹

This incident occurs at the point when Clara Hamps is introduced for the very first time in the trilogy. On numerous later occasions Bennett exhibits her religious fanaticism and hypocrisy in such a ruthlessly sarcastic manner that it often verges on sadism. In These Twain, Bennett remarks ironically that although Edwin cannot respect Clara Hamps, he is forced to 'admire her gorgeous and sustained hypocrisy, in which no flaw had ever been found.'³² On her death-bed, she is still monitoring the moral conduct of her servant Minnie, who has had an affair with a barman and is pregnant. Mrs Hamps sees to it that Minnie is dismissed. Her very last words, to Edwin, are to ensure that Minnie will not get her wages: 'And if she asks – for her wages – tell her – I say there's nothing due – under the circumstances.'³³ Darius, though not a religious hypocrite, is a narrow-minded domestic tyrant. His limited mentality makes him blind to those aspects of life which simply cannot be measured in monetary terms. When Edwin makes bold to express his desire to be an architect, Darius regards the idea as intolerably absurd: 'Architecting! There's neither sense nor reason in it! Neither sense nor reason!'³⁴

The egotism of the Five Towns in general is also well exemplified by the trilogy and is chiefly displayed from Edwin's point of view. Darius and Clara Hamps promptly reject as crazy any talk of an independent Ireland and of free education. The Young Men's Debating Society of the Methodist Chapel regard themselves as intellectually enlightened as compared with the rest of Bursley. Yet despite their appearance of superiority, they reveal themselves as

intolerant of any form of dissent from orthodoxy. When Edwin speaks in favour of Bishop Colenso's claim that he could find no disapproval of polygamy either in the Bible or in the writings of the Ancient Church, he is astounded by the alarm he raises among the other members of the society. He finds himself the only one to sympathize with the bishop and realizes that 'the chasm between himself and the others was a real chasm.'³⁵ The group of people who attend the Clayhangers' Sunday musical evening feel like fugitives and conspirators because: 'Were it known, it could excite only hostility, horror, contempt or any intense bovine indifference; chiefly the last... Breathe the name of Chopin in that land!'³⁶

Bennett's view of life as melancholy and repressive is not confined to his Five Towns fiction. A general greyness dominates his London novels as well. Concerning The Pretty Lady, John Lucas observes that it is 'the darkest of all Bennett's novels, and its pages are shot through with a sense of destruction, brutality and evil.'³⁷ As it is set in war time, Bennett uses a lot of horrifying images and incidents to suggest a distorted civilization and universal chaos. During one of the zeppelin raids, G. J. Hoape, the central character of the novel, loses his stick and taking out his torchlight to search for it on the road, discovers 'a child's severed arm, with a fragment of brown frock on it and a tinsel of ring on one of the fingers of the dirty little hand.'³⁸ In the munitions factory for which Concepcion Iquist works, a girl worker is killed in a ghastly accident: 'All her hair was dragged [by the machine] from under the cap, and in no time all her hair was torn out and the whole of her scalp ripped clean off.'³⁹ Much of the story is set at night. Utter darkness is pierced through by glaring light of search-lights, fires and the explosion of bombs.

Corresponding with the outward darkness is the grey mentality of Bennett's characters. Lady Queenie Paulle is shown to be an egotist, beautiful, aristocratically arrogant. Her perverted psychology is best seen in the incident

in which she climbs on to the roof of her house to watch a zeppelin attack and gets killed by a machine gun. She takes positive delight in this masochistic action and displays a spectacular indifference towards fear and pain: 'For her, war is a matter of rejoicing. She loves the excitement, and is herself part of its energy and violence.'⁴⁰ Her friend Concepcion reveals a similar mentality. Her husband is killed at the front early in the story and she herself only narrowly escapes a nervous breakdown. On receiving the telegraph of her husband's death, she perversely endeavours to suppress her hysteria by a dramatic recital of some lines from Shakespeare:

She snatched the telegram, tore it in two and pushed the pieces back into her gown. " 'Poor wounded name!' " she murmured, " 'my bosom as a bed shall lodge thee.' " The next moment she fell to the floor, at full length on her back.⁴¹

To dispel her feeling of loss, she works maniacally on various war jobs. She threatens to commit suicide. Although the French cocotte Christine displays no nihilistic disposition of the kind apparent in both Queenie and Concepcion, it is in her that the general mournfulness of the story reaches its height. She is seen at the end of the novel to lose Hoape's love, which she has tried desperately to maintain, apparently through a misunderstanding on Hoape's part. Unaware of her yearning to contribute in some way to the war effort, and incomprehensive of her sense of commitment to prostitution as a profession, which has been cultivated in her adolescence by her prostitute mother, Hoape believes that she has sunk to a level which she herself has previously despised, and decides to break their precarious relationship. This is utter disaster for the weak-minded and sentimental Christine. Thus ends the tragic story of the three female characters of the novel. Their tragedy is not inherently ascribable to the war, as James Hepburn observes about The Pretty Lady: 'Mournfulness pervades the novel as an expression of a judgment upon

the human condition, of which war is simply a manifestation.'⁴²

Apart from the above cases, there prevails a claustrophobic morbidity in Riceyman Steps. Lord Raingo (1926) is all melancholy and depression. The second half of the latter novel is chiefly concerned with the physical decline of Sam Raingo and his eventual death. At the end of the story, Sam, his wife Adela, and his mistress Delphine are all dead, 'as though a whole way of life is shown to carry death within it'.⁴³ In Sam's delirium, the already dead Adela and Delphine successively make their appearance. The novel thus ends in a deadly finale. In addition, The Roll Call (1918), and Imperial Palace to a lesser degree, also exemplify Bennett's inclination towards a dark sense of repression in his London novels.

Anna is mainly concerned with the development of a young woman from her innate passivity to her eventual tragic resignation to a life of lovelessness and futility. The Old Wives' Tale deals with two sisters taking different routes of life that eventually converge. The main theme to emerge from this parallelism is the unheroicness and tragical nature of life itself, which is a simple business of being young, growing old and meeting death. This pessimistic view is reinforced by the fundamental similarity in mentality between the sisters despite their widely divergent experiences. Clayhanger and These Twain do not have a distinct theme. Both of them are full of daily incidents common to provincial lower-middle-class people. Riceyman Steps is a condensed study of a miser. Despite the differences in subject matter, there obtains an invariable greyness and sense of repression in Bennett's novels. This becomes even more clear when the fact is taken into consideration that Bennett's consistency in maintaining this gloom was not disturbed by fame. A Man from the North and Anna were written in his early years of relative anonymity, yet Riceyman Steps was published at the height of his reputation. The French realists had always seen life as dark and sinister. This had not

generally been the case with the English novelists. By the time Bennett was writing, a universal pessimistic view of life was prevalent in the Western world. The outlook attains a peculiar salience in Bennett. This is due to the combined workings of various influences: French pessimism that had persisted for nearly a century and showed no sign of losing its momentum by the turn of the century; his puritanical upbringing in an area that engaged in one single industry; and the ethos of the times. George Moore presents a sufficiently dark picture of life in A Mummer's Wife, its pessimism being thorough-going. However, towards the end of his Esther Waters (1894) the darkness had been considerably alleviated. George Gissing is pessimistic enough, but the gloomy pictures of his fictional world could be said to be the offsprings of the disillusionment of his sublime social ideal. The Jago of Arthur Morrison is virtually an inferno, yet it can at least be destroyed physically, and hope of salvation is held out to the apparently damned Jago race by the humanism of a priest. The gloom that obtains in Liza of Lambeth (1897) is a genuine gloom, but it originates largely from a more explicit social commitment than Bennett could ever have shown. In this respect Somerset Maugham displayed no such persistence as Bennett. In comparison, the melancholy prevalent in Bennett's fiction, though lacking the intensity of the pessimism of the contemporary novelists, encapsulates more assuredly a widespread feeling of the age.

A variation of Bennett's theme of repression and frustration is the lack of individuality and ultimate defeat in many of his characters. This is seen as a result, and against the background, of limited social surroundings and antagonistic circumstances, especially in his Five Towns fiction. It is also ascribable to his conviction that art should be concerned with the usual and the ugly. Thus, Anna Tellwright and Willie Price are clearly meant to be failures, as has been shown previously. In Leonora (1903), the heroine Leonora has a vulgar and dishonest husband - John Stanway. She displays

considerable indeterminacy as to whether to leave him to fulfil the passion for her lover Arthur Twemlow. Although a potentially interesting figure, she emerges as a placid embodiment of such a notion as sadness of the loss of youth, and a direct voice for the theme of marital incompatibility. In a somewhat different light, Leonora's uncle Myatt is unmistakably presented as a bundle of non-descript attributes:

He was of that small and lonely minority of men who never know ambition, ardour, zeal, yearning, tears; whose convenient desires are capable of immediate satisfaction; of whom it may be said that they purchase a second-rate happiness cheap at the price of an incapacity for deep feeling. In his seventh decade, Meshach Myatt could look back with calm satisfaction at a career of uninterrupted nonchalance and idleness.⁴⁴

The incapacity for emotion seems to be his sole notable quality. John Stanway's rival in the inheritance of the Myatts's property, Frederic Ryley, is all dullness and passivity: 'He was neither amusing nor smart nor clever, nor even vivacious; he had little acquaintance with games, music, novels, or the feminist movement; he was indeed rather dull; but they liked him because he was fundamentally and invariably "nice".'⁴⁵ He has been a nobody to almost everybody; yet towards the end of the story, he comes into possession of a fortune through the death of the Myatts and thereby acquires a sort of quality.

The Old Wives' Tale presents the parallel lives of the two sisters Constance and Sophia. In contrast to Sophia's, Constance's life is more obviously marked by an uneventfulness and by conformity to conventions. She marries a Five Towns man, she never leaves the district. She is made to embody the very spirit of the region – narrowness of mind: 'Under the various influences of destiny, she had remained essentially what her father had been. Not in her was the force of evolution manifest.'⁴⁶ In her youth she is capable of a moderate rebellion against some age-old customs, as can be seen in the case of the ticket innovation, in which she is said to be the 'moral supporter' of Samuel

Povey as opposed to the conservative older generation. However, in her old age, she adopts an increasingly hostile attitude towards any kind of social reform and becomes a dogged and fanatical guardian of the old order. She curses the electric tram-cars of Hanbridge, simply because she is comfortably accustomed to the old steam-engine variety. When the municipal liberty of the five small towns is threatened by the new need for centralization, Constance in her utter incomprehension cannot but bear a grudge against it:

The vast grievance of the Federation scheme weighed on her to the extremity of her power to bear... She was incapable of perceiving the absurdity involved in perpetuating municipal divisions which the growth of the district had rendered artificial, vexatious, and harmful. She saw nothing but Bursley, and in Bursley, nothing but the Square.⁴⁷

Despite her illness, she sneaks out of her house into the street in a desperate final effort to vote against this obscenity: to 'do her share in the killing of Federation.'⁴⁸ This participation in the vote becomes the immediate cause of her death.

Sophia's life is relatively romantic and adventurous. She elopes with Gerald Scales, a commercial traveller from Manchester, from the grim confines of the Five Towns to lead a more eventful life in Paris. Yet, for all her sagacity and astuteness, which helps her to survive in a foreign world, Bennett allows her only a modest success in running a pension: her ingrained provincialism remains always part of her personality. After she has returned to Bursley to live with Constance, they stay in the Rutland Hotel for two weeks. Here her fundamental similarity to Constance is unmistakably brought to light:

When someone of cosmopolitan experience, having learned that she had lived in Paris for many years, asked what had been going on lately at the Comedie Francaise, she had to admit that she had not been in a French theatre for nearly thirty years. And then, on a Sunday, the same person questioned her about the English chaplain in Paris, Lo! she knew nothing but his name, had never even seen him. Sophia's life, in its way, had been as

narrow as Constance's.⁴⁹

In Clayhanger, the elder Clayhanger sister Maggie gradually declines into a drab spinsterhood and passively accepts her role as dependable and cheap family drudge. Although a minor character, she is in many ways similar to Anna Tellwright, yet she does not achieve even the partial intellectual and emotional awakening that Anna does. She is simple-minded, quiet, ignorant and, above all, indifferent towards novelty and excitement. When Edwin asks her for a halfpenny to buy a *Signal* for the long-expected news concerning the political future of Ireland, her deplorable apathy and incomprehension fully disclose themselves:

It was absolutely astonishing, the ignorance in which Maggie lived, and lived efficiently and in content. Edwin filled the house with newspapers, and she never looked at them... Here the whole of England, Ireland, and Scotland was at its front doors that night waiting for newsboys, and to her the night was like any other night!⁵⁰

She is such a non-entity to her relatives that, 'save that the smooth-working mechanism of the repast would have cracked and stopped at her departure, she might have slipped from the room unnoticed as a cat.'⁵¹ She can be aroused from her dormancy, for a short while, only by such purely domestic concern as the making of jam: 'To her it was scandalous that greengage jam should be jeopardized for the sake of social pleasure.'⁵²

In striking similarity to Maggie's life is that of Janet Orgreave. In her young 'womanhood' she loves Edwin, but does not take any active step to secure his love. Her affection for him therefore never has a chance of expressing itself sufficiently. She eventually ends up accepting the desolate life of a spinster. She has a comfortable home and apparently affectionate parents. Yet she passively allows herself to be exploited by her relatives. Of her, Bennett

remarks: 'Though in one aspect she seemed indispensable, in another the chief characteristic of her existence seemed to be a tragic futility.'⁵³

Edwin is the character whom Bennett uses as the narrative point of view for most of the Clayhanger trilogy. Through him, the Five Towns narrowness of mind, religious fanaticism, hypocrisy, and parental tyranny, are demonstrated and criticized. Yet his entire career is said to be 'banal ... was what everyone knew.'⁵⁴ As a boy, he has his lofty aspiration to be an architect. Following in the footsteps of the Orgreaves, he upholds the cause of liberalism against the puritanism of Bursley and becomes its leading representative in These Twain. However, he adheres to the district throughout the trilogy. Only at the end of the last of the three novels does he decide, urged by Hilda, a more militant critic of Five Towns provincialism, to buy a house away from the region and to live there permanently. However, to escape the place is by no means to escape the mentality of its people, as he is shown in The Roll Call, a sort of sequel to the Clayhanger trilogy. About Edwin, John Lucas observes:

He lacks the adventurousness of Richard Larch or Cyril Povey. But he also cares about his family, maddening though it is. And there are compensations in staying put. To some extent this derives from a deep-rooted inertia. Edwin finds it easier to let life come to him than to go in search of life.⁵⁵

Clearly, Edwin's frame of mind is characterized by an innate self-satisfaction which is seen to be an essential part of Five Towns psychology, despite all his efforts to revolt against it and his self-assigned role as an upholder of liberalism. After Darius's death, he assumes a sort of despotism over Maggie, as is best seen in the case where they argue about the exact age of Clara Hamps. Maggie says that Clara Hamps was fifty-five or fifty-six when Darius died and that nearly three and a half years have passed since then. Edwin's reaction is:

'Two and a half you mean?' Edwin interrupted with a sort of savageness.

'No, I don't. ...'

...But he said nothing. Partly he wanted to read in peace, partly he did not want to admit his mistake. Bit by bit, he was assuming the historical privilege of the English master of the house. He had the illusion that if only he could maintain a silence sufficiently august his error of fact and of manner would cease to be an error.

'Yes, she must be fifty-nine,' Maggie resumed placidly.

'I don't care if she's a hundred and fifty-nine!' snapped Edwin. 'Any more coffee? Hot, that is.' ⁵⁶

Similar to the case of Constance, who is shown beyond doubt to have inherited the qualities of the older Baineses towards the end of The Old Wives' Tale, Darius's personality thus repeats itself in Edwin. Five Towns mentality is transmitted from generation to generation. Nobody escapes being victimized by it, not Leonora, or Sophia, or Edwin. When Edwin makes his final appearance in Bennett's fiction in The Roll Call, he is said to be an alderman, a typical Five Towns man, declining into oblivion:

Alderman Edwin Clayhanger, undeniably stout, with grey hair and beard, was passing from middle age into the shadow of the sixties. He dressed well, but the flat crown of his felt hat, and the artificial, exaggerated squareness of the broad shoulders, gave him a provincial appearance. His gestures as he paid the driver was absolutely characteristic – a mixture of the dignified and the boyish, the impressive and the timid.⁵⁷

A Man from the North, though a marginally Five Towns novel, is Bennett's purest study of mediocrity and defeat, with its unheroic protagonist and its dull less important characters filling in all its depressing scenes. Richard Larch's literary friend Mr Aked, though eccentric and even inspiring to Larch, is treated as essentially commonplace. He might have achieved some modest success but for bad luck: he has serious dyspepsia for twenty years and produces virtually nothing. Larch's colleague in the lawyer's office, Albert Jenkins, who guides him into a familiarity with the more vulgar side of

lower-middle-class life in London, is a sort of rascal. Adeline Aked, with whom Larch is for a time in love and who deserts him, is average in intelligence and has no literary taste whatsoever. Laura Roberts, who, it is hinted, is morally dubious, and whom Larch finally marries, is in an even more deplorable position – she is kept uninformed that Larch has once had literary ambitions. Larch never tells her this because she simply would not understand. Larch himself frequents sombre and dingy restaurants, displays petty vanities, associates with vulgar and eccentric friends, and has dull lovers. His failure is due as much to his mediocre intelligence as to adverse circumstances. About his progression towards defeat, Lucas observes: 'Bennett scarcely falters in his tracing of Richard Larch's downward curve from would-be writer to ex-non-writer.'⁵⁸ The once ambitious young man from the north eventually ends up with the acceptance of a drab and dull future life:

He would be simply the suburban husband – dutiful towards his employers, upon whose grace he would doubly dependent; keeping his house in repair; pottering in the garden; taking his wife for a walk, or occasionally to the theatre; and saving as much money as he could.⁵⁹

In fact, the characters under discussion are all characterized by a lack of vitality, incapable on the one hand of the villainy of some characters in the French realists' fiction, and on the other, of the kind of sublimity of mind apparent in many Victorian protagonists.

Bennett's concern with mediocrity and defeat manifests itself in the London novels as well. In Lord Raingo, Sam Raingo is shown to be unimaginative and sentimental, to have an 'ordinary face', and to be a 'commonplace husband'.⁶⁰ If there is anything noticeable about him, it is dullness. To some extent, he recalls Edwin Clayhanger. His wife Adela displays an even more deplorable lack of individuality. She is seen through Raingo's eyes to have 'a face not uncomely, but interesting.' She is 'self-centred, placid, tepid, vague. Above all

tepid and vague.' She is 'neither kind nor unkind'; she is 'unobservant', 'untidy and disorderly'; and she plays bridge, tennis and golf, 'in moderation and moderately well.'⁶¹ Her one notable quality is snobbery. She shows a nonchalance towards everything except her husband's ennoblement.

Determined by heredity and environment, the characters in the French realists' and in some English realists' works are doomed to fail in their efforts to improve themselves. Yet they do endeavour to rise above circumstances. In contrast, Bennett's Five Towns characters, oppressed by a restraining social atmosphere, scarcely make any effort to rise above it. Instead, they adapt themselves to it, passively accepting it to the point of becoming a complacent part of it. This can be regarded as a modification by Bennett of the harsher French notion of environmental determination. Unlike characters in the French realists' and naturalists' fiction, Bennett's characters do not degenerate economically and morally. Yet, their mentality can still be seen as a reflection of a repressive social ambience, which is perpetually victimizing them in the way that it acts as a recalcitrant hindrance to their possible spiritual, intellectual and emotional fulfilment, and in the way that, with virtually no exception, it traps and naturalizes them in its unenlightened, anti-progressive moral net-work. This is best exemplified in the cases of Anna, Constance and Edwin. The lack of volition apparent in all Bennett's major characters contributes to, as well as results from, this negative naturalization and tends to diminish their human status, reducing them to a deplorable level of non-entities. A Man from the North, written by a youthful Bennett enchanted by French literature, embodies his purest effort to emulate his masters in strict terms of hereditary and environmental determination. Larch does make an effort to rise above the low circumstances he finds himself in when he first arrives in London, and is defeated in a fairly similar way to that in which Emma Bovary, Gervaise, Etienne Lantier, Kate Ede and many of Gissing's

characters are defeated in life, and is, therefore, a somewhat different case from Bennett's Five Towns figures.

Bennett's preoccupation with life as something as essentially sombre and gloomy is also observable in his concern with marital and sexual discord, which he regards as an invariable actuality. This inclination should not be considered as a product of any specific artistic tenet, though it is certainly ascribable to the influence of the French realists and naturalists, for whom marital incompatibility was a favourite subject. By the late nineteenth century, the theme was becoming common in English fiction. Bennett was drawn to it from the start of his career.

Early in A Man from the North, Richard Larch is shown to be a man who is not only frustrated in his literary aspirations but also deprived of an adequate emotional life. In his love affair with Adeline Aked, the obstacle to emotional satisfaction is a deplorable lack of intellectual compatibility. Adeline is the daughter of Larch's colleague and literary friend Mr Aked, who is said to have been an acquaintance of Carlyle. Admiration and respect for the father leads to affection for the daughter. Yet when Larch endeavours to push their relationship to a higher plane of intellectual agreement, he fails in his purpose. They have little conversation, and the conversation they do have is of a trivial nature. Larch attempts to entice her into serious discussions, but does not succeed. He mentions books he has read, but she shows only a lukewarm interest. If he explains why a particular play is good and another bad, her reaction is generally a preference for the inferior one. She can make some perfunctory remarks upon certain characters in a play, but he seldom finds himself genuinely in agreement with her. All he can do is to feebly concur. It even makes no difference to her whether a play is a comedy or tragedy, as she is more interested in the playhouse than the play. All in all, she is apathetic towards any aspect of life which involves the intellect. Fourteen

months after Larch breaks off with Adeline, he resumes his relationship with Laura Roberts, who is a waitress at the dingy restaurant which he frequents. Compared with Adeline, Laura is of a more sensual nature. She is described as being 'capable of the most passionate feeling', and Larch is said to have a 'predilection for the sleeping-volcano species of woman.'⁶² Yet Laura Roberts shows even less intellectual inclination than Adeline. By now Larch has been defeated in his ambition to become an author and yields to the sensual part of his divided personality: 'He liked Laura; she was a woman, a balm, a consolation. To all else he obstinately shut his eyes, and, casting away every consideration of prudence, hastened to involve himself more and more deeply.'⁶³ As has already been mentioned, he marries her without even telling her of the literary aspirations he once had.

Little is known of Bennett's early sexual experience. There is, however, a glaring discrepancy between his public image as a militant realist and his inability to deal with sexuality adequately. It seems likely that the reason for his unwillingness or incapacity to face up to complete sexual abandonment is to be found in his puritanical upbringing. Whatever his personal experience, the impossibility of complete emotional harmony between man and woman is a central motif in his very first novel, which was finished ten years before his first marriage, and remained an unchangeable conviction throughout his career. Thus, in Anna, the heroine has to endure a married life in which there is a total lack of emotional attachment. In the much later Lord Rainsford, Sam Rainsford has to put up with a slatternly and snobbish wife who 'carried nonchalance into love' and an infidel mistress who is 'capable of the deepest duplicity.'⁶⁴

In Leonora, the heroine tries by every means to live in peace with a husband who is unintelligent and dishonest, but fails. Leonora is almost entirely excluded from John Stanway's business life. Stanway, on his side, is indifferent to her feminine expectations and preoccupations. In the

circumstances, a third person steps into their married life, and there can be no doubt that Bennett's sympathy is with Leonora and Twemlow. In These Twain, the issue of marital incompatibility reaches an unusual intensity and a large proportion of the novel is devoted to it. For Edwin, evidence of Hilda's 'wilful naughtiness and injustice' is 'endless, innumerable.'⁶⁵ The discord between husband and wife attains its height over the issue whether to buy Ladderedge Hall. Edwin prefers a direct confrontation - 'war' - to peace. In his bitter resentment against his wife, his Christmas presents to her become 'false tokens of love'. He speaks 'with frigid and disdainful malevolence'. His words are 'righteously and almost murderously resentful' and seem to 'startle and frighten the very furniture.'⁶⁶ However, he eventually compromises and yields to her desire to become the mistress of the big house. Through Edwin's friend Tertius Ingpen, Bennett directly expresses his ambivalent attitude towards marriage:

There's almost no intellectual honesty in marriage. There can't be. The entire affair is a series of compromises, chiefly base, on the part of the man. The alternative is absolute subjection of the woman, which is offensive.⁶⁷

By 1916, when these words were written, Bennett had been married to Marguerite for ten years. His own marriage proved to be in accordance with his early intuitions: he was legally separated from Marguerite in 1921. He was now undoubtedly drawing upon his personal experience for the writing of fiction. In The Pretty Lady, the central character G. J. Hoape lives with the French cocotte Christine. Through them, Bennett introduces differences in national temperament into the issue of sexual disharmony. Christine has a violent passion for Hoape. Her foremost fear in life is to lose his love, and she is particularly sensitive to the national differences between them: 'The thought of her insatiable temperament flashed through her as she held him [Hoape],

and of his northern sobriety, and of the profound, unchangeable difference between these two.⁶⁸ Hoape on his side is well aware of Christine's warmth, adaptability, responsiveness, naivety, and above all, her intense womanliness. All these qualities are set in contrast to those of the English woman Concepcion, who is hysterical, passionate and theatrical and for whom Hoape maintains some kind of love. However, Hoape is essentially conventional. Despite the intensity of Christine's love for him, he cannot bear the prospect of living permanently with a seemingly unreformable courtesan who, for all her contempt for those of her profession at lower levels, seems to him to yearn for 'adventurous debauch' and to be 'the slave of her temperament.'⁶⁹ Obviously, an English gentleman cannot put up with a sensual French woman for long. He dismisses Christine at the end of the novel and turns to Concepcion. However, it is left doubtful whether he will find love with her. She threatens to commit suicide. The novel concludes with the reader still uncertain whether she is likely to carry out her threat.

It is in Whom God hath Joined (1906) that Bennett carries out his most concentrated study of marital incompatibility through the two divorce cases of Ridware v. Ridware and Fearn v. Fearn. Although Bennett called it a 'divorce novel', it is, in fact, concerned more with marriage than with divorce.⁷⁰ In the case of Lawrence and Phyllis Ridware, the wife at the outset of the story is said to have ceased to love her husband for four years and to be in love with a certain Emery Greatbatch. Lawrence Ridware is informed of the situation by an anonymous letter and decides to take legal action. Who is to blame for this break? Through Lawrence's brother Mark, Bennett points out that Lawrence is a man who lacks 'enterprise and initiative', whereas Phyllis Ridware, like Leonora, is shown to be a highly imaginative woman who can evoke in her mind a vivid vision of herself and her lover living in a colony far away from the Five Towns.⁷¹ She longs for passionate love and her need is satisfied by

Greatbatch who, though an invalid, is 'capable of a mighty and terrible passion,' which is exactly what Lawrence is not.⁷² In the case of the Fearnses, the lawyer Charlie Fearn is a womanizer: 'For twenty-five years, in obedience to the ever-growing tyranny of concupiscence, he had carried on a series of intrigues of all kinds... Year by year his sense of honour and of shame had dwindled, until he was in a way to become nothing but the embodiment of an overmastering and lawless instinct.'⁷³ His degradation is revealed when his daughter Annunciata discovers that he and the French governess Renee have had an affair and tells her mother Alma of his infidelity. A legal suit seems inevitable. However, while the Ridwares succeed in getting a divorce, the Fearnses fail, because Alma Fearn cannot endure the prospect of Annunciata appearing in public and being a witness to her father's infidelity. Alma Fearn is a conventional woman. Conventions require that, for social respectability, marital harmony be sacrificed, or at least maintained. Though Charles regrets his misconduct, Alma is well aware that he will not change and this she docilely accepts. Before a year has passed, Charles is said to be pursuing his affairs with more discretion and away from the Five Towns: 'He was very discreet, and very attentive to his wife; and he never began to vary from the path of rectitude till he had reached London, where all things are hid.'⁷⁴ Thus, in Bennett's fiction, conjugal discord is shown to be a universal and unalterable actuality which one has to stoically face and accept. Already, at the opening of the novel, Bennett has remarked that 'there are hundreds of Greatbatches in the Five Towns'.⁷⁵ At a later stage, Charles's deceit of Alma for a quarter of a century is said to be disclosed only by 'a moment's indiscretion and a moment's folly.'⁷⁶

CHAPTER 4

AN 'INVISIBLE GOD' ?

Since the doctrine of artistic impersonality constitutes a vital aspect of realism and naturalism, any attempt at a systematic assessment of Bennett's particular brand of realism must necessarily involve a close study of the ways in which this doctrine manifests itself in his work. The aim of the present chapter is therefore to evaluate and define, mainly from a technical point of view, this specific aspect of Bennett's fiction. The focus of attention will be Bennett's first major novel Anna of the Five Towns, which, published at a time when Bennett was still under the powerful sway of artistic idealism, shows relatively little of his later compromise with the reading public. This aspect of Bennett's work has not gone unnoticed by previous critics. H. G. Wells referred to 'the impersonal school' in his discussion of Anna, and George Sturt wrote to Bennett about the same novel:

You refuse to be emotional yourself: you are unimpassioned, will not take sides, and all that – which is quite right. But you seem unwilling to let the reader be emotional. You refuse to ask him to sympathize: you simply call upon him to observe.¹

Sturt's criticism here would seem to describe exactly what constitutes the strength of the novel. Anna's survival as one of Bennett's most successful novels can to a large extent be ascribed to his technical mastery of impersonality. How does he achieve this 'unimpassioned' effect?

As a considerable proportion of the story is related from the point of view of Anna and that of other characters, their feelings, thoughts and conduct are to be understood strictly as theirs and should not be confused with those of the narrator, who is at a higher level on what Geoffrey Leech and Michael Short in their Style in Fiction (1981) have called the 'discourse relation scale'. Leech and Short draw a hierarchical diagram to illustrate the complex

discourse relations between the author and the reader concerning the encoding and decoding of information. They maintain that 'novels can contain at least three levels of discourse embedded one inside another, operating at the levels of author and reader, implied author and implied reader, and narrator and interlocutor'. They also identify a fourth level which is embedded within the level of narrator and interlocutor where characters converse with one another and the narrator reports the conversations.² Applied to Bennett, these stylistic theories throw considerable light upon his concern with techniques of authorial detachment. For instance, Willie Price – the object of Anna's sympathy and eventually, of her love – first appears in the novel through the point of view of Anna's sister Agnes. For Agnes, 'his simple, pale blue eyes had a wistfulness which made her feel towards him.' (p.17.) When Anna comes to the Prices' factory to collect the rent, she thinks that Willie has 'the look of a ninny.' (p.50.) For her, as for Agnes, 'there was nothing in his blue eyes but simplicity and good intentions.' (p.50.) Bennett tentatively defines and establishes the relationship between Anna and Willie by using Anna's point of view – Willie is of a weak, simple and honest nature and Anna is to pity and protect him: 'Beside him she felt old, sagacious, crafty: it seemed to her that someone ought to shield that transparent and confiding soul from his father and the intriguing world.' (p.50.) Anna's sympathetic attitude comes over to the reader as being prompted simply by a natural kindness tinged with a sort of comically naive condescension. But what about the author's attitude? As much of the third chapter is told from Anna's point of view, is the reader to believe that there exists a discrepancy between the attitude of the author and that of his heroine? Given that Anna's feelings and thoughts, whether unfolded from the narrator's point of view or from her own, are ultimately messages from the author, and as Anna is not only the central character but also the chief 'reflector' throughout the novel, the reader could assume that

her attitude is to a considerable degree identifiable with Bennett's own.³ But, if a literal identification can so easily be established between Bennett and his fictional creature, the result would surely be poor art. Bennett, very much the artist in this case, retreats to the background and adopts a detached stance. There can be detected no intrusive author's voice. There is not even an obvious narrator objectively presenting facts. What the reader does have is Anna the character acting as the reflector. If information about Willie had been revealed from the narrator's point of view, the reader would be in less direct contact with Willie, since as soon as the narrator is interposed between the action and the reader, even though in an unobtrusive manner, the reader has a right to doubt the authenticity of the action.⁴ A character used as reflector helps to create an impression of immediacy. In the case of Willie's appearance, the authenticity of what is portrayed is increased also by Bennett's use of two characters rather than one – in addition to Anna, there is Agnes – as vehicles for conveying information. Moreover, Willie is portrayed through reflectors of different ages – a child and an adult. The subjectiveness lurking in their respective impressions of him is therefore accorded a more objective basis than it would have if only one reflector had been used.

In a manner similar to the treatment of Willie's appearance, the entire factory of the Prices is portrayed from Anna's point of view. This fact itself is not of great significance. The overall impersonal effect of Anna is to a large extent created by Bennett's *large-scale* use of characters' point of view to replace the role of a central narrator. Most English novelists of Bennett's time, with the exception of Henry James, would have heavily relied upon the narrator for a detailed description of the Prices' works. Bennett devotes two full pages (pp.48-9) to what Anna sees, thinks, and feels in the factory, but apart from a few lines that provide the background information of the business relationship between Ephraim Tellwright and Titus Price and are technically

negligible, the whole passage is presented from Anna's point of view. How Titus Price appears to Anna from a particular position and at a particular time is given a meticulous portrayal. Similarly, the decrepit condition of the factory is depicted in great detail. Even more effective support of this point can be found in Bennett's treatment of Mynors's works, which is described at even greater length and in an even more exhaustive manner without narratorial intrusion. In this case, Anna and Mynors are the surveyors.

Apart from the method of describing a place from a character's point of view, Bennett also uses a reflector to portray social occasions. The sewing meeting held at the Suttons, for instance, is chiefly described from Anna's point of view.

Although when using a character's point of view, Bennett relies largely on Anna, there are several obvious cases where other characters are used as reflectors. After sixteen introductory lines which are naturally controlled by the narrator and in which Agnes first makes her appearance, the point of view subtly shifts to her:

For a time her bright eyes were fixed expectantly on the doorway; then they would wander, and she started to count the windows of the various Connexional buildings which on three sides enclosed the yard – chapel, school, lecture-hall and chapel keeper's house. (p.15.)

In the subsequent context, Bennett uses Agnes as the 'centre of consciousness' to introduce two important characters – Henry Mynors and Willie Price:

Agnes was alone.

'Well, young lady?'

She looked round with a jump, and blushed, smiling and screwing up her shoulders when she recognized the two men who were coming towards her from the door of the lecture-hall. (p.16.)

Then Mynors starts teasing Agnes and the reader is shown that she 'scrutinized' Mynors's 'sparkling and vehement black eyes with the fearless calm of infancy.' Mynors's eyes are further described from Agnes's point of view:

His eyes, so kind and sincere, and that mysterious, delicious, inexplicable something which dwelt behind his eyes: these constituted an ideal for her.

As for Willie Price, after a few lines of narratorial control, in which the reader sees his awkward manner and is informed of his age, Bennett again makes Agnes take over the role of the reflector:

Agnes liked him too. His simple, pale blue eyes had a wistfulness which made her feel towards him as she felt towards her doll when she happened to find it lying neglected on the floor. (p.17.)

In the succeeding paragraphs the narrator assumes the point of view. Through him Mrs Sutton is introduced. Yet Agnes is present throughout the scene in which Mrs Sutton and Mynors converse in an easy manner, neglecting the self-conscious and diffident Willie Price. Then in a quite controlled tone, the narrator reveals facts about the background of the Suttons. Immediately afterwards, Agnes is again made the centre of the scene until the protagonist Anna is finally introduced through her. It is from this point onwards (p.19.) that Anna plays the part of the chief reflector. Agnes has fulfilled her mission of introducing all the important characters of the story, except Ephraim Tellwright. It is by this strategy that Bennett considerably reduces the prominence of the narrator, who, in more conventional novelists, such as Balzac, would usually assume a lengthy and voluble dominance in the opening passages of a novel. Clearly, if at this stage of the novel Mynors is presented through the eyes of Agnes as amiable and

sincere only to turn out an arch figure of hypocrisy later, the author/narrator – ultimately Bennett himself – is not to be held responsible for her judgment.

Once Agnes has served this initial part as a reflector, the principal role of point of view is handed over to Anna, although there are occasions when the point of view shifts to other characters. On Anna's twenty-first birthday, immediately before Tellwright's revelation to her that she is to be the inheritor of an enormous fortune of fifty thousand pounds, which is of paramount importance to the plot development, Tellwright himself is made the reflector:

As he read laboriously through communications from solicitors, secretaries of companies, and tenants, he could hear his daughters talking together in the kitchen. Anna was washing the breakfast things while Agnes wiped. Then there were flying steps across the yard: Agnes had gone to school. (p.40.)

Clearly, Bennett is selective in choosing characters as reflectors. Each one chosen must be of functional significance, as the cases of Agnes and Tellwright demonstrate. If a character is playing an important role in the plot development, he enjoys the privilege of a technically foregrounded position.

Apart from the use of the point of view of individual characters, Bennett also uses a collective point of view, as in the case where the Bursley townsfolk gossip about Anna's engagement to Mynors. The reader is first told by the narrator that Beatrice Sutton, upon her return from the Isle of Man, loses no time starting the gossip, which soon preoccupies the attention of the whole town. Then, the narrator appears to be simply reporting what is being talked about: 'Anna's private fortune rose as high as a quarter of a million. As for Henry Mynors, it was said that Henry Mynors knew what he was about.' (p.212.) But immediately after this, there occurs a shift of tone, with the author/narrator assuming a voice which anyone in the town might have used in the circumstances:

After all, he was like the rest. Money, money! Of course it was inconceivable that a fine, prosperous figure of a man, such as Mynors, would have made up to *her*, if she had not been simply rolling in money. Well, there was one thing to be said for young Mynors, he would put money to good use; you might rely he would not hoard it up same as it had been hoarded up. However, the more saved, the more for young Mynors, so *he* needn't grumble... So tongues wagged. (pp.212-3.)

It is only in the last sentence that the narrator resumes his control. This is the same method used by Flaubert in Madame Bovary and other novels.⁵ The presentation of the gossip itself strikes a markedly colloquial tone, which is indicated by the expressions 'made up to' and 'you might rely he would not hoard it up same as it had been hoarded up'. Both cases are obvious deviations from the norm of the narration. In addition, the italicizing of 'her' and 'he' represents an attempt to transcribe the inflexions of the townsfolk when gossiping and contribute to a sense of immediacy. If the narrator has disappeared and the gossip cannot be attributed to the point of view of any particular character, who after all is to be responsible? The answer is that there is not an easily identifiable individual agent but an abstract figure. What this abstract personage thinks and says is meant to represent the general opinion of the townsfolk. Yet if the author/narrator does not offer an explicit agreement with this general opinion, it is still obvious that Bennett intends it to be an objective fact that allows no misinterpretation that may result from the subjectiveness lurking in the judgment of one single character. The collective point of view represents another technical aspect of Bennett's overall attempt at authorial effacement.

It should be noted that although Bennett varies the point of view in Anna, the variation by no means assumes the degree of centrality as it does in Madame Bovary, which had been published half a century before Bennett's novel. As for A Man from the North and Clayhanger, Bennett's two autobiographical novels, there is virtually no variation of the point of view.

Richard Larch and Edwin Clayhanger are technically dominant figures. Scenes, events and characters are overwhelmingly presented through their eyes and thoughts. They could be considered as technical substitutes for the narrator. Just as he is not a rigid realist in subject matter, so Bennett is relatively modest in the technical sphere. By contrast, in Madame Bovary, Flaubert not merely allows the two lovers, Rodolphe and Leon, of the chief reflector Emma, to assume the point of view, but also a large number of less important characters, so that a multitude of different and conflicting attitudes, feelings and thoughts are directly presented before the reader, without the go-between figure of the narrator. The result is that the authorial presence is massively effaced, the subjectivity of the characters' minds is exhibited in its unmediated form. In Anna, Mynors and Willie, comparable figures to Rodolphe and Leon, are presented largely from Anna's point of view and, to a lesser extent, directly from that of the narrator.⁶ Bennett never allows them to be reflectors. The result of this approach is that the reader has to form his judgment chiefly through the intermediary figure Anna. However, when information concerning them is revealed through the narrator, Bennett on the whole does not allow him to pass direct judgment. He tends to disclose 'facts' through dramatized scenes. This is well illustrated in the opening chapter. In the case of Anna being used as an instrument, the reader sees *her* mind working in all its indeterminacy. As a result, the reader has frequently to analyze Anna's attitude in order to form his own opinions about Mynors and Willie. In the case of Willie, Anna's judgment basically agrees with the attitude of the author/narrator and the reader may be expected to accept it as of considerable reliability. In the case of Mynors, however, there is an obvious discrepancy between Anna's attitude and that of the narrator, and a considerable amount of hesitancy and suspicion on her part produces a strong sense of uncertainty in the reader.

The Anna-Willie-Mynors relationship constitutes an even more interesting case when Anna is contrasted with its French counterpart Eugénie Grandet. As has been pointed out in Chapter 2, there are two roughly corresponding trios: Anna-Willie-Mynors and Eugénie-Charles-De Bonfons. Unlike Bennett, Balzac's narrative procedure consists in the use of the narrator, the points of view of Charles, Eugénie, and other characters. In this manner, Eugénie's choice of Charles as opposed to other suitors is revealed in unequivocal terms at an early stage of the story, while Anna is unfolded overwhelmingly from the heroine's point of view, with the narrator offering little comment or judgment. The result is that at each stage, the reader knows the protagonist in so far as she knows herself, as Louis Tillier has pointed out.⁷ On page 22, Anna's inchoate feelings concerning her suitor are characterized by a puzzlement, which is the result of the utter strangeness to her of the opposite sex as she has been confined to a narrow domestic environment with no adequate social life – the Tellwrights, who are said to be a mysterious and unsociable species among the Bursley townsfolk, have remained willingly and contentedly on the verge of the community. On page 23, she appears at first uncertain as to whether Mynors is interested in her money or in her person and gradually arrives at the belief that he loves her person, although not without some reservation. On page 35, when Anna unexpectedly catches sight of Mynors, she is in a highly agitated and nervous state and the description of her feelings reveals her to be seemingly in love with him:

Anna dared not conjecture what impulse had led him into this extraordinary, incredible deviation... Her heart began to beat rapidly; she was in distress. Aware that her father and sister had left her alone, did he mean to call?... Now she heard his sharp, decided footsteps, and through the glazed panels of the door she could see the outline of his form. He stopped; his hand was on the gate, and she ceased to breathe... Gradually the tears rose to her eyes and fell; they were the tincture of a strange and mystic joy, too poignant to be endured. (pp.35-6.)

In the Special Teachers' Meeting scene, she again appears to be in love with Mynors. With absorbed attention and admiration, she watches him chair the meeting. On page 75, she thinks Mynors to be a 'God'. On page 85, after Mynors has given her advice with regard to her difficulty in getting herself converted to Wesleyan Methodism, there is sincere thankfulness on her part. It is not until the 'Downfall' chapter that she is seen to be no longer unsure as to whether she is genuinely in love with Mynors – she has destroyed the cheque to help *Willie* out in much the same way as Eugénie gives her gold coins to Charles to help him start a new career after the bankruptcy of his family. At this stage, Anna finds herself unable to confide in Mynors over this issue. She resents his condescending attitude to Willie, and with 'amazing injustice, she was capable of deeming Mynors a Pharisee because she could not find fault with him, because he lived and loved so impeccably and triumphantly.' (pp.198–9.) It is at this late stage that Mynors is exhibited for the first time before the reader in a unmistakably negative light. Even then, Bennett the author makes Anna aware of her 'amazing injustice'. Soon afterwards, towards the end of the novel, the author turns Anna's pity and motherly love for Willie into a lover's love, in an abrupt manner, and so ends the story.⁸

Since the reader has little access to information about Mynors's and Willie's feelings towards Anna, he experiences a sense of uncertainty so long as Anna is shown to be uncertain. Concerning Bennett's method Louis Tillier observes:

This indirect approach – or, as it might be called, this point of view method of narration – is not, in the present case, without drawbacks. The reader is bound to misunderstand Anna as long as she misunderstands herself; and when the true state of her heart is suddenly revealed to him as well as to herself, this belated enlightenment, amounting almost to a revulsion of feelings, plausible though it is in a woman of Anna's disposition, seems too sudden and insufficiently prepared to be entirely

convincing.⁹

In this ascription of Bennett's unconvincing treatment of the final relationship between Anna and Willie to his point of view technique is manifest a tendency to neglect his strong commitment to the doctrines of realism. The point that the reader inevitably misunderstands Anna so long as she misunderstands herself is a modified version of George Sturt's earlier criticism. It was, however, Bennett's *intention* for Anna to be constantly uncertain of herself so as to create a constant sense of uncertainty in the reader. His approach is strictly in accordance with his professed theoretical apprenticeship and stance. Bennett is to 'take sides' and to prevent his heroine's misunderstanding herself only after a sufficiently long period of fictional time. Authorial detachment is to be maintained even at the expense of the credibility of the story, and this is to be achieved largely by using Anna's point of view.

Despite the general uncertainty produced by the overwhelming use of Anna's point of view, and the withdrawal of the narrator's judgment and comment, there is one aspect about which the reader feels much less uncertain as regards the author's intention – the money-chasing nature of Mynors's courtship of Anna. In this case, as in general, Bennett avoids the use of an omniscient author/narrator and employs different characters' points of view to reveal conflicting attitudes. The reader is expected to form his own opinion by judging these different attitudes. On page 23, Anna's thoughts are presented through the mingled use of her point of view and that of the narrator:

Many people would say, and more would think, that it was her money which was drawing Mynors from the narrow path of his celibate discretion. She could imagine all the innuendoes, the expressive nods, the pursing of lips, the lifting of shoulders and of eyebrows. 'Money'll do owt'; that was the proverb. But she cared not... she knew beyond the possibility of doubt that, though Mynors might have no incurable aversion to a fortune,

she herself, the spirit and body of her, had been the sole awakener of his desire.

Anna is shown to be finally arriving at the decision that her person is the prime cause of Mynors's love for her, but the reader can easily discern the self-deceptiveness of her conviction. Her indeterminacy contrasts strongly with the certainty that characterizes the opinion of her father, who can clearly be more objective than she since no sexual element is involved in his judgment:

He saw in Henry a young and sedate man of remarkable shrewdness, a man who had saved money... a man who could be trusted to perform that feat of 'getting on'. A 'safe' and profoundly respectable man, at the same time audacious and imperturbable. He was well aware that Henry had really fallen in love with Anna, but nothing would have convinced him that Anna's money was not the primal cause of Henry's genuine passion for Anna's self. (p.182.)

In this case Tellwright temporarily assumes the role of the reflector; the narrator is entirely absent. Since the father is in a position to see things more objectively than the daughter, the reader has reason to believe that Tellwright's judgment is of greater validity than Anna's. Finally, as has been pointed out before, Bennett uses the collective point of view of the Bursley townsfolk to express the opinion of the average person in the town, which is basically in agreement with that of Tellwright but is of greater cognizant reliability since this abstract figure does not even have the admiration that Tellwright has for Mynors's astuteness in business.

Clearly, information can be gathered from three distinct points of view. Bennett never allows the narrator a technically foregrounded position to express *his* opinions as regards the matter under discussion, as Balzac would have done. Nor does Bennett allow Mynors, the object of the judgment, to be in direct contact with the reader, information about him being disclosed largely

through the go-between figure Anna. This kind of treatment differs from that of Bel-Ami (1885), in which the thoughts and feelings of Georges Duroy, a roughly comparable character to Mynors, are conveyed from his own point of view and exposed before the reader in their brazen unmediated form, its pungent nakedness being such that the reader easily detects the mind of the sado-masochistic Maupassant at work. This is in strong contrast to Bennett's restrained disposition.

Although the point of view technique helps to achieve impersonality, a complete authorial effacement is not attained even in a strictly technical sense, because generally a certain directing figure is still needed to regulate the appearance of characters, to arrange scenes and dialogue, and to decide whose point of view the reader is to follow next. By presenting characters' thoughts in their spontaneous form, and by rendering action through characters' thought processes, stream-of-consciousness writers have reduced the authorial presence to a minimum and have thereby brought about a sort of revolution in the technical sphere of fiction. Virginia Woolf presents Lucrezia's thoughts in the following way:

People must notice; people must see. People, she [Mrs] thought, looking at the crowd staring at the motor caLucrezia]lish people, with their children and their horses and their clothes, which she admired in a way; but they were "people" now, because Septimus had said, "I will kill myself," an awful thing to say. Suppose they had heard him? She looked at the crowd. Help, help! She wanted to cry out to butchers' boys and women. Help!¹⁰

As the passage almost exclusively contains Lucrezia's thoughts, the point of view is automatically her's.¹¹ However, the impersonal effect arises rather more from Virginia Woolf's method of thought presentation than from the fact that she uses the point of view of Lucrezia. The point of view method is not the only way to attain authorial detachment. Concerning the ways in which

thoughts are rendered in fiction, Leech and Short list five different modes:

- 1 Free Direct Thought:
Does she still love me?
- 2 Direct Thought:
He wondered, 'Does she still love me?'
- 3 Free Indirect Thought:
Did she still love him?
- 4 Indirect Thought:
He wondered if she still loved him.
- 5 Narrative Report of a Thought Act:
He wondered about her love for him.¹²

Seen in the light of Leech and Short's approach, it is clear that Woolf here uses the Free-Direct-Thought, Direct-Thought and Free-Indirect-Thought modes to represent Lucrezia's thought process and invites the reader to directly experience it. The intermediary elements on the discourse relations scale disappear almost completely with the result that the character seems to be directly addressing the reader.¹³ As early as 1957, Stephen Ullmann attributed Flaubert's impersonality to his use of 'free indirect style'.¹⁴ In his discussion of Flaubert's comparison of the author with a detached God, Ullmann maintains: 'Free indirect style is the exact equivalent, on the linguistic plane, of this withdrawal of the author from his work.'¹⁵ Yet the fact that most of the quotation from Mrs Dalloway consists of an interior monologue does not mean that the narratorial voice is entirely silent. Apart from the reporting clauses 'she thought', the phrase 'looking at the crowd staring at the motor car' and the sentence 'She looked at the crowd' constitute interruptions of Lucrezia's thought process by the lingering presence of the narrator.

An examination of Bennett's treatment of some of his characters' thoughts will reveal that many important features of Woolf's approach are already apparent in his work. Consider Bennett's representation of Anna's thoughts at the Special Teachers' Meeting:

Anna felt, as she had often felt before, but more acutely now,

that she existed only on the fringe of the Methodist society. She had not been converted; technically she was a lost creature: the converted knew it, and in some subtle way their bearing towards her, and others in her case, always showed that they knew it. Why did she teach? Not from the impulse of religious zeal. Why was she allowed to have charge of a class of immortal souls? The blind could not lead the blind, nor the lost save the lost. (p.57.)

The passage is rendered overwhelmingly in the Free-Indirect-Thought mode. Other modes of thought presentation frequently occur in Bennett's other novels. In The Old Wives' Tale, after a separation of thirty years, Sophia is informed that her husband Gerald Scales is dangerously ill in Manchester. Her thoughts on this occasion are rendered in several different modes:

Of course the event had been bound to happen. People do not vanish never to be heard of again. The time arrives when the secret is revealed. So Sophia said to herself – now! ... She had forgotten him. It was years since he had ceased to disturb her thoughts – many years. 'He *must* be dead,' she had persuaded herself.¹⁶

Here, the first sentence is Free Indirect Thought, the second and third Free Direct Thought, and the last Direct Thought. Evidence of this variation of thought presentation modes can also be found in Clayhanger and other novels. It should be noted that in the immediate preceding quotation from Anna, the narrative voice occurs only in the first sentence. This contrasts with the pattern found in the passage quoted from Mrs Dalloway. Interior monologue is not as pervasive in Bennett as in Joyce and Woolf, but when he uses it, the narratorial presence is actually less conspicuous than it is in Mrs Dalloway, at least at a syntactic level. Bennett's representation of thoughts in the Free-Indirect-Thought mode constitutes another of his methods of minimizing authorial presence.

In Clayhanger, Free Indirect Thought is used on a larger scale and serves more varied functions than in Anna and The Old Wives' Tale:

Yes, she was alone. No Janet! No Alicia! How had she managed it? What had she said to the Orgreaves? That she should have come alone and through the November rain, in the night, affected him deeply. It gave her the quality of a heroine of high adventure. It was as though she had set sail unaided, in a frail skiff, on a formidable ocean, to meet him. It was inexpressibly romantic and touching. She came towards him, her face sedately composed. She wore a small hat, a veil, and a mackintosh, and black gloves that were splashed with wet. Certainly she was a practical woman. She had said she would come, and she had come, sensibly but how charmingly, protected against the shocking conditions of the journey. There is naught charming in a mackintosh. And yet there she was, in this mackintosh!... Something in the contrast between its harshness and her fragility... The veil was supremely charming. She had half lifted it, exposing her mouth; the upper part of her flushed face was caged behind the bars of the veil; behind those bars her eyes mysteriously gleamed... Spanish!... No exaggeration in all this!¹⁷

Here the sentences are either a straightforward representation of Edwin's thoughts in the Free-Indirect-Thought mode, or a direct portrayal of Hilda Lessways's action from Edwin's point of view. The sentences dealing with Hilda's action do not contain reporting clauses, and therefore at a syntactic level, they are in complete harmony with the Free-Indirect-Thought sentences dealing with Edwin's thoughts. The overall effect the passage renders is Edwin's total immersion in his thoughts, with the result that the description of Hilda's action appears to be filtered through his thought process, the portrayal of action merging spontaneously into the portrayal of thought. Compared with the passage from Anna, the impression this quotation conveys is that it not only transcribes Edwin's thoughts but also describes, through his thought process and in detail, Hilda acting her mysterious role in the darkness of night and the November rain. Since the depiction of action through a character's thought process is something that is not usually found in the novelists of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, it could be claimed that Bennett's effort to achieve authorial effacement by using Free Indirect Thought on such a considerable scale is an immediate anticipation of the radical change soon to be brought about in the technique of fiction. Bennett's performance is

remarkable even by the standard of stream-of-consciousness novelists. It is wrong to over-emphasize the revolutionary nature of Woolf's technique while neglecting the preparatory work done by novelists like Bennett.

As in other novelists using Free Indirect Thought, Bennett's employment of this method also produces an empathetic effect. Free Indirect Thought can create not merely an impression of complete narratorial withdrawal but also an effect of the empathetic identification of the author/narrator with the character.¹⁸ Since the function of Free Indirect Thought may appear to undermine the present argument, it should be emphasized that the overwhelming effect of Free Indirect Thought is objectivity of reproduction and authorial effacement at the syntactic level; that empathy is somehow a by-product and, more importantly, is by no means harmful to the achievement of authorial detachment. Ullmann observes: 'Impersonality did not mean aloofness for Flaubert; it had as its complement a capacity for sympathetic self-identification with the protagonists of the story.'¹⁹ Stylisticians generally agree that Free Indirect Thought, like Free Indirect Speech (the equivalent to Free Indirect Thought in speech presentation in fiction), is essentially an impersonal, mimetic method of presentation, and serves as an objective vehicle for reveries, lyrical effusions and self-analysis.²⁰ It should be noted at this point that Bennett, in his use of Free Indirect Thought, is chiefly indebted to the French realists, but it is not a coincidence that out of the major English women novelists of the nineteenth century, he holds Jane Austen in exceptional esteem. Having criticized George Eliot and the Brontë sisters, he noted in his journal at the time of writing Anna: 'Jane Austen ... is different. By no means does she commit the artistic folly of insisting too much. Her style has the beauty of the strength of masculinity and femininity combined, and, very neatly, the weakness of neither.'²¹

Despite his large-scale use of the point of view technique and Free

Indirect Thought in Anna, Bennett, like all the nineteenth-century novelists, including Flaubert, still has to rely on the narrator as a guiding, co-ordinating linking element, in order to attain an integrated effect in a novel. Since Bennett on the whole does not allow his narrator frequently to make direct judgments and comments, that is, to intrude too much, and, if this is technically difficult to avoid, he endeavours to present them in an objective and unobtrusive manner, an unimpassioned effect can still be achieved without a too heavy dependence upon the point of view technique and Free Indirect Thought. It should also be noticed that occasionally the reader has only an *impression* that a particular fragment of a novel is presented from a particular character's point of view, that frequently there can be considerable ambiguity regarding whether the point of view is one character's or another's, or whether it is simply the narrator's. Occasionally there is also difficulty in deciding whether a particular sentence is in the Free-Indirect-Thought mode or simply the narratorial voice. The ambiguity arises largely through the tone of the author, which could render highly confusing the relationship between the author, the narrator and characters. It can happen that while the perception is a character's, the language is beyond any doubt the narrator's. As with Flaubert, Bennett, in his use of the point of view technique, generally maintains a restrained but *unified* style. This certainly applies to Anna.

Apart from the obvious fact that Anna could not have used Bennett's syntax and vocabulary, she could not have used certain elaborated figurative speeches either:

She [Beatrice] disappeared ahead like a goddess in a cloud, and scarcely a woman who saw her from the humble level of the roadway but would have married a satyr to be able to do as Beatrice did. (p.139.)

From the context of this passage it is understood that the author is using

Anna's point of view. Yet it is unlikely that her education could have provided her with a knowledge of Greek mythology. In addition, there is a glaring discrepancy between the mocking tone and Anna's passive and sympathetic disposition, which could not possibly have yielded such pungent sarcasm. This can be explained only by the author's hostile attitude towards his creation. Subsequently, there is a further ironic description at the expense of Beatrice:

Barret [the family driver of the Suttons] was unpacking the hampers, which contained delicate creamy confectionary for the teachers' tea; Beatrice explained that these were her mother's gift, and that she had driven down in order to preserve the fragile pasties from the risks of the railway journey. Gratitude became vocal, and Beatrice's success was perfected. (p.139.)

The scene is unfolded mainly through Anna's eyes and the tone is by and large balanced, even though the facts presented are unfavourable to Beatrice. In the last sentence, however, there occurs a take-over of point of view by a strongly biased author/narrator. Occasionally, the ironic attitude of the author/narrator can be constrained for a considerable space and then unmistakably betrayed by a single word released at a subtly calculated stage:

Several men prayed, and a pause ensued, all still kneeling.

Then the minister said in a tone of oily politeness:

'Will a sister pray?'

Another pause followed.

'Sister Tellwright?'

Anna would have welcomed death and damnation. She clasped her hands tightly, and longed for the endless moment to pass. At last Sarah Vodrey gave a preliminary cough. Miss Vodrey was always happy to pray aloud, and her invocation usually began with the same phrase: 'Lord, we thank thee that this day finds us with our bodies out of the grave and our souls out of the hell.' (pp.77-8.)

This scene is again rendered from Anna's point of view. The adjective 'oily' in the second sentence is obviously derogatory, but the minister's conduct might be taken as a straightforwardly presented fact. There is no irony in this case. Anna's mental torment is described in a quite neutral tone. Her ordeal is ended

by Sarah Vodrey's voluntary action, and the adjective 'preliminary' undoubtedly discloses the hostility of the author towards Wesleyan Methodism and his mixed feelings of pity and contempt for the religious fanatic Sarah Vodrey. This is a subtle and dry irony that is reinforced by the last sentence which, although apparently conveying a fact which only an author intending to mock might have chosen to present to the reader, resumes the previous neutrality of tone and thereby effectively conserves the subtlety of the whole scene. The overall impression is one of authorial detachment, even though there is an unmistakable irony underlying the scene.

Similar is the author's treatment of Mynors in the scene where he is praying at the Special Teachers' Meeting and being watched by Anna:

Mynors's prayer was a cogent appeal for the success of the Revival. He knew what he wanted, and confidently asked for it, approaching God with humility but with self-respect. (p.57.)

The first sentence appears to be a plain report of a plain fact. So would the second but for the eerie presence of the word 'approaching', which constitutes a deviation from Bennett's usual presentation. This single word serves as a discreet indicator of Bennett's satirical attitude towards Wesleyan Methodism and towards Mynors at this particular juncture. The satire has such a modest air that the reader cannot help wondering whether Anna's point of view is still in control or whether there has occurred a narratorial take-over. There is considerable technical ambiguity arising out of the irony. The function of 'approaching' differs from that of 'preliminary' by its greater subtlety and relative mildness. The presentation of the whole scene verges upon a plain neutrality (of course both the preceding and succeeding context should be taken into consideration). As in the first case, Bennett uses hit-and-run tactics. The result is a weird kind of irony which sneaks in and flits away almost imperceptibly, creating a sense of uncertainty on the part of the reader

with regard to the author's real attitude.

Bennett's general critical stance towards the provincialism of the Five Towns first manifests itself in Anna and at moments when this is conveyed the intrusive authorial voice sounds sonorously. When Tellwright contemplates his investments, there occurs the first instance in all Bennett's works of his satirical treatment of Five Towns mentality:

He made no attempt to conceal his pride in these investments. And he had the right to be proud of them. They were the finest in the market, the aristocracy of investments, based on commercial enterprises of which every businessman in the Five Towns knew the entire soundness. They conferred distinction on the possessor, like a great picture or a rare volume. They stifled all questions and insinuations. Put before any jury of the Five Towns as evidence of character, they would almost have exculpated a murderer. (p.42.)

Here, no character's point of view is used: instead, there is an assertive narrator earnestly exhibiting the self-complacency of Tellwright, and of the Five Towns folk in general. While words and phrases like 'finest', 'the aristocracy of', 'rare', 'entire', and 'exculpated a murderer' are hyperbolic, the tone can be described as restrained. Although the irony is obvious it does not possess the subtle brutality that marks the Revival meeting, as will be discussed later. In The Old Wives' Tale and Clayhanger there is ample evidence of this kind of authorial bias towards the Five Towns. The opening passage of the first of these novels provides a clear example of this bias:

Happily the inhabitants of the Five Towns in that era were passably pleased with themselves, and they never even suspected that they were not quite modern and quite awake. They thought that the intellectual, the industrial, and the social movement had gone about as far as these movements could go, and were amazed at their own progress. Instead of being humble and ashamed, they actually showed pride in their pitiful achievement. They ought to have looked forward meekly to the prodigious feats of posterity; but, having too little faith and too much conceit, they were content to look behind and make comparisons with the past. They did not foresee the miraculous generation which is us. A poor, blind, complacent people.²²

This should not be regarded as subtle mockery as the reader sees clearly that a resentful Bennett is giving vent to some personal grudge. The sarcasm is so straightforward that it can be safely assumed that , as a rule, the tenet of impersonality does not at all apply to Bennett's treatment of what he sees as the Five Towns psychology. Again, it should be noticed that the passage is rendered in the form of narratorial comment.

On page 100 of Anna, the reader sees that , while revealing information about the background of William Sutton – the prototype of Osmond Orgreave in Clayhanger and an embodiment of enlightenment as opposed to the general blindness of the Five Towns – the narrator once again is brandishing his critical cudgel upon his native district:

At a school treat once, held at a popular rural resort, he had taken some of the teachers to a cave, and pointing out the wave-like formation of its roof had told them that this peculiar phenomenon had actually been caused by waves of the sea. The discovery... seriously impaired his reputation among the Wesleyan community as a shrewd man of the world. Few believed the statement, or even tried to believe it, and nearly all thenceforth looked on him as a man who must be humoured in his harmless hallucinations and inexplicable curiosities.

Here, Bennett's criticism consists in the soberly presented facts themselves. The style is marked by his usual control and plainness. There can be discerned no irony whatsoever on the part of the author/narrator, but rather a direct, though relatively mild accusation.

The authorial/narratorial presence is also strongly felt in the topographical description of the Five Towns. As a norm, whenever the need occurs to portray the district at some length, the occasion also provides a chance for the author to display his aesthetic beliefs and to philosophize about nature and life in general in a totally conventional manner. Certain notions were so precious to Bennett that he could not allow them to be expressed directly by his characters. This mission he invariably took upon himself. Consider the first

full-length description of the Five Towns in all Bennett's fiction:

1. Beneath them [Anna and Mynors], in front, stretched a maze of roofs, dominated by the gold angel of the Town Hall spire. 2. Bursley, the ancient home of the potter, has an antiquity of a thousand years. 3. It lies towards the north end of an extensive valley... 4. Nothing could be more prosaic than the huddled, red-brown streets; nothing more seemingly remote from Romance. 5. Yet be it said that romance is even here – the romance which, for those who have an eye to perceive it, ever dwells amid the seats of industrial manufacture, softening the coarseness, transfiguring the squalor, of these mighty alchemic operations. 6. Look down into the valley from this terrace-height where love is kindling, embrace the whole smoke-girt amphitheatre in a glance, and it may be that you will suddenly comprehend the secret and superb significance of the vast Doing which goes forward below. 7. Because they seldom think, the townsmen take shame when indicted for having disfigured half of a country in order to live. 8. They have not understood that this disfigurement is merely an episode in the unending warfare of man and nature, and calls for no contrition... 9. Out beyond the municipal confines, where the subsidiary industries of coal and iron prosper amid a wreck of verdure, the struggle is grim, appalling , heroic – so ruthless is his havoc of her, so indomitable her ceaseless recuperation. (pp.24–5.)

Hitherto the author has been using Anna and Mynors as reflectors and it could be assumed that in sentence 1 their point of view is still in control. This is indicated by the reference to 'them' and the use of the past tense in accordance with the preceding narration. In 2 the author/narrator positively takes over the point of view, with a syntactic shift from the past to the present tense. From then on, the passage is entirely in present tenses. In this case, Bennett's approach is similar to that of Flaubert when he describes Yonville in present tenses and in great detail in Part II of Madame Bovary. It might seem to be a coincidence or even imitation on the part of Bennett that he too uses present tenses for the topographical description of the Five Towns. However, when the fact is taken into consideration that Bennett uses the Five Towns as the setting not merely for Anna, but for more than half of his novels and for most of his major novels, whereas Flaubert uses Yonville only for Madame Bovary, then it becomes apparent why Bennett should so

emphatically draw attention to his omniscient position by syntactic means. But the assertiveness of the omniscient author/narrator does not only consist in the occasional use of present tenses against the predominant norm of the past tenses. As has been briefly mentioned, an important topographical description of the district may also contain an opportunity for the author to preach his aesthetic and philosophic views. In sentences 4 and 5 there is an elaborate version of Bennett's doctrine that beauty is to be found in the ugly. In 6, the author/narrator, as though playing the role of a tourist guide, directly addresses the reader and urges him to view the valley from a position recommended by himself and insists that the reader/tourist take the same notion as himself that sublimity is inherent in all human activities. In 7 and 8 the guide stresses his omniscience and complacently informs the reader/tourist of the ignorance of the local people. The last sentence contains a condensed version of Bennett's beloved view, which recurs frequently on other occasions and in other works, that in the unrelenting human fight against a crude and unyielding nature there lies intrinsically a mighty heroism.

On page 73, in Bennett's portrayal of a night scene in the Five Towns there can be found a less assertive author/narrator:

Anna ... went to the window and looked out... To the far right across the fields the silhouette of Hillport Church could just be discerned on the ridge. In front, several miles away, the blast-furnaces of Cauldon Bar Ironworks shot up vast wreaths of yellow flame with canopies of tinted smoke... The entire landscape was illuminated and transformed by these unique pyrotechnics of labour atoning for its grime, and dull, weird sounds, as of the breathings and sighings of gigantic nocturnal creatures, filled the enchanted air. It was a romantic scene, a romantic summer night, balmy, delicate and wrapped in meditation. But Anna saw nothing there save the repulsive evidences of manufacture, had never seen anything else.

In contrast to the preceding quotation, the entire description here is rendered in the past tense. There is no philosophizing, and the impression it gives is of

a sober and balanced objectivity of reproduction. This relative authorial modesty is ascribable to Bennett's use of Anna's point of view. Even on this occasion, the author does not forget to sermonize about his notion of beauty to be found in the ugly. This becomes particularly obvious in the last two sentences. They contain a succinct narratorial summary, which indicates a point of view take-over. The author/narrator further reveals his identity by maintaining Anna's blindness towards the kind of beauty that he can see. This is a clear case of authorial identification and distancing.

In Bennett's use of the imperative in his first full-length description of his native district there is automatically a 'you', although it is omitted, and an implied 'I', which represents the author's real self. Use of the imperative generally indicates a strong authorial assertion. On page 125, after Mynors has accompanied Anna on a tour of his pottery works, they are alone in a warehouse. In reply to Mynors's invitation to visit the factory again, Anna, a bit embarrassed by his advances, gives an awkward answer:

'Yes', she said, 'I expected so. Well, I must go, at once; I'm afraid it's very late now. Thank you for showing me round and explaining, and - I'm frightfully stupid and ignorant. Good-bye.'

Vapid and trite phrases: what unimaginable messages the hearer heard in you!

The last sentence is undoubtedly uttered by the author/narrator, and is a glaring technical intrusion. The author is not only paternally scolding his artistic creature, but does so in an emphatically straightforward manner, directly addressing her as 'you'. This anticipates the much-discussed first-person intrusion in The Old Wives' Tale concerning Samuel Povey's comically heroic attempt to obtain an acquittal for his murderer cousin Daniel Povey:

I have often laughed at Samuel Povey. But I liked and respected

him. He was a very honest man. I have always been glad to think that, at the end of his life, destiny took hold of him and displayed, to the observant, the vein of greatness which runs through every soul without exception.²³

This goes a step further than the method of just addressing a character as 'you', with the author abandoning any attempt to conceal his real identity. He straightforwardly addresses the *reader* as opposed to a fictional figure by referring to himself as 'I' and thereby implies that the story he has been relating has a factual basis.

Bennett's irony can also be contained in chapter titles, 'The Kindling of Love' and 'The Priory' for instance. The first of these occurs at the very beginning of the story, when the reader is not yet in a position to judge whether Mynors's courtship of Anna is motivated by genuine love, since he has had access to only a limited amount of information. But on page 25, in the long topographical portrayal of the Five Towns, which is rendered from the author/narrator's point of view, there occurs a sentence which conveys unmistakably an omniscient author/narrator's critical attitude towards the situation: 'Look down into the valley from this terrace-height where love is kindling, embrace the whole smoke-girt amphitheatre in a glance, and it may be that you may suddenly comprehend the secret and superb significance of the vast Doing which goes forward below.' 'Love is kindling' is subtly put in a syntactically inconspicuous position – a relative clause – and is psychologically overshadowed by a multitude of images concerning the topographical features of the district. This flitting reference to the Anna-Mynors relationship easily escapes a careless reader's attention. It might well have been the caprice of the author. Yet if the reader is careful enough, he will associate the mention of 'love' at this stage with the chapter title, which is in a prominent position both technically and psychologically, and with Anna's indeterminacy when pondering Mynors's courtship of her. He will then detect a kind of irony which

arises from the jarring discrepancy between the occurrences of roughly the same phrase in two blatantly different positions and which also lies in the sneaking reference to 'love' in an unexpected context.

The irony of the second of these cases has been pointed out by Thomas J. Roberts.²⁴ 'The Priory' is the title of the chapter, the name of the Prices' house and of the home of Anna and Mynors's future married life. On page 19, when Anna is introduced, her face is described as suited 'for a cloister'. At a much later stage, after she is engaged to Mynors, they lease the house of the bankrupt Prices. By now, Anna has experienced a sort of partial emotional and spiritual awakening, but the author intends her to turn out ultimately to be the embodiment of a stoical acceptance of things as they are. Thus the lease of the Priory not only parallels Anna's failure to assert herself but also ironically symbolizes her futile married life in the future. This ironic situation is extended into a cold and subtle satire and is cruelly emphasized by mentioning Mynors's following conduct:

It was agreed. [Anna and Mynors will move into the house in the coming February.]

'I've taken the Priory, subject to your approval,' Henry said, less than a fortnight later. From that time he invariably referred to the place as the Priory. (p.219.)

It is significant that Mynors, Anna's future husband and a major if unknowing vehicle for the accomplishment of the circle of Anna's spiritual and emotional dormancy, partial awakening and eventual suppression, does not speak immediately after they make the decision, but only two weeks later, while the name of the house which is put prominently at the end of the chapter section, is sardonically stressed to be Mynors's preference. The irony can be better appreciated when the fact is taken into consideration that Anna has to agree to live in the house of a man whom she always feels ashamed at having helped to victimize and who has hitherto been the object of her pity and

motherly affection and is soon to turn out the man she really loves. The entire situation being thus, the reader feels prompted to assume that underneath Bennett's apparently restrained manner, irony is pervasive and occasionally borders on cold brutality.

As has been shown, Bennett is without doubt biased against Wesleyan Methodism. This attitude expresses itself much more strongly in the scene of the Revival meeting, which constitutes the most concentrated satire of religious faith in all Bennett's fiction. Fourteen years after the publication of Anna, he let Edwin Clayhanger in These Twain savagely curse the Wesleyan minister Mr Peartree, as was pointed out in Chapter 3. But in that case Bennett uses the point of view of Edwin, and the character's thoughts are presented as a vehement but straightforward attack on Wesleyan Methodism as personified by the minister. Technically, the author/narrator is entirely absent. The Revival meeting scene in Anna is treated in an entirely different manner and deserves discussion in some detail:

1. The revivalist, mounting a stool, suddenly dominated the congregation.
2. His glance swept masterfully across the chapel and round the gallery.
3. He raised one hand with the stilling action of a mesmerist, and the people, either kneeling or inclined against the front of the pews, hid their faces from those eyes.
4. It was as though the man had in a moment measured their iniquities, and had courageously resolved to intercede for them with God, but was not very sanguine as to the result.
5. Everyone except the organist, who was searching his tune-book for the next tune, seemed to feel humbled, bitterly ashamed, as it were caught in the act of sin.
6. There was a solemn and terrible pause.
7. Then the revivalist began: 'Behold us, O dread God, suppliants for thy mercy - '
8. His voice was rich and full, but at the same time sharp and decisive.
9. The burning eyes were shut tight, and Anna, who had a profile view of his face, saw that every muscle of it was drawn tense.
10. The man possessed an extraordinary histrionic gift, and he used it with imagination.
11. He had two audiences, God and the congregation.
12. God was not more distant from him than the congregation, or less real to him, or less a heart to be influenced.
13. Declamatory and full of effects carefully calculated - a work of art, in fact - his appeal showed no error of discretion in its approach to the Eternal.
14. There was no minimizing of committed sin, nor yet an insincere and grovelling

self-accusation. 15. A tyrant could not have taken offence at its tone, which seemed to pacify God while rendering human audience still more contrite. 16. The conclusion of the catalogue of wickedness and swift confident turn to Christ's Cross was marvellously impressive. 17. The congregation burst out into sighs, groans, blessings and Amens; and the pillars of distant rural conventicles who had travelled from the confines of the circuit to its centre in order to partake of this spiritual excitation began to feel that they would not be disappointed.(pp.67-8.)

In the preceding context, the point of view is Anna's, but up to the stage where the quotation begins, there has already occurred a subtle narratorial take-over. Subsequently, the narratorial control becomes unequivocal and this is indicated largely by the sonority of the authorial/narratorial tone throughout the passage, since Anna, in her eagerness to be converted, could not possibly have related her experience to someone in such a manner. Her point of view is positively resumed only in sentence 9. Sentences 1-3 appear to be an objective reproduction, though even here, the reader can detect a faint and uncanny sort of irony. The revivalist is shown to be endeavouring to bring under his control the attention of the whole congregation through a dramatic act. Irony becomes more obvious in 4. Apart from the general satirical effect it produces, it can also be discerned at a phrasal level. The unusual semantic combinations 'measure iniquities', and to a lesser extent, 'courageously resolved', clearly carry a mocking message; 'to intercede for them with God' is neutral in tone, but the phrase 'It was as though' echoing 'seemed' in 5, reveals the author/narrator's reservation: he means more than his words literally convey and the reader is expected to work out this extra meaning for himself. 6-8 all appear to present plain facts, but taking into account Bennett's overall intention, they may as well be regarded as a parody. 10-12 are all comments, and the coldly sardonic message 12 carries should not be missed by any reader who is careful enough. In 13, 'calculated' and 'art' both carry negative connotations, and 'in its approach to the Eternal' considered in

connection with the preceding 'appeal', conveys subtle mockery. The next sentence seems neutral in tone, yet it is a weird neutrality. 15, echoing 10-12, once again satirically contrasts a human audience with a supreme transcendental Being. In 16, the noun 'catalogue' has a derogatory meaning, while 'swift', 'confident' and 'marvellously impressive' are all ironic. 17, like 6-8, appears to be an effort at objectivity of reproduction; and there can be seen a thorough emotional arousal, an intense ecstasy and an awesome solemnity.

The total effect the passage renders is an at once restrained and seemingly objective report of a religious scene immersed in a subtle yet *brutal* satire. Linguistically, there are several occurrences of words and phrases meaning 'seem', which generally conveys an ironical uncertainty; some strange semantic combinations, which are also ironic; and a reasonably high proportion of derogatory words. In addition, there are frequent ironic comparisons of the congregation with God. By these methods, Bennett conveys information in a manner at once impersonal and strongly personal. The effect is a great deal more devastating to Wesleyan Methodism than Edwin's direct curse in These Twain. And such savage irony is achieved to a large extent by various *semantic* and *syntactic* means.

A comparable approach is to be found in the agricultural fair scene in Madame Bovary:

Monsieur Lieuvain now sat down. Monsieur Derozerays stood up and began another speech. His was perhaps not as flowery as the councillor's but it had the advantage of a more positive style: it combined more specialized knowledge with loftier considerations. Less time was devoted to praising the government and more to discussing religion and agriculture. He brought out the connection between them and showed how they had always worked together in the development of civilization. Rodolphe was talking to Madame Bovary about dreams, presentiments and magnetism. Going back to the infancy of society, the orator depicted the savage times when men lived on acorns in the depths of the forest. Then they had stopped wearing animal skin, put on cloth, dug furrows in the ground and planted vines. Had this really been beneficial to mankind?

Monsieur Derozerays pondered this question. From magnetism, Rodolphe had gradually come to the subject of affinities, and while the chairman was citing Cincinnatus at his plow, Diocletian planting cabbages and the Chinese emperors beginning the new year by sowing seeds, the young man was explaining to the young woman that the cause of such irresistible attractions lay in some previous existence.²⁵

The general impression is that the author/narrator is reporting certain facts in an unbiased way although 'brought about' is slightly ironical and the eighth and tenth sentences are in the Free-Indirect-Speech mode and have similarly an effect of ironic narratorial distancing. Irony would then seem to arise from the constant alternation of the narrative focus: now on Derozerays and now on Rodolphe and Emma. Irony consists in the presented facts themselves. Derozerays is making a high-faluting and pompous speech on the history of agriculture, which would rather seem to convey a general pretentiousness than to express a sincere intention to do anything practical. Rodolphe, too, is talking to Emma on some general topics - seduction clad in quasi-intellectuality. Irony also lies in the order in which information is unfolded. Derozerays's high-flown speech is emphatically juxtaposed with the amorous dalliance between Rodolphe and Emma.

Compared with Bennett, Flaubert's irony manifests itself more in the selection of information than in the manner in which it is presented. Except for the few instances already pointed out, Flaubert is obviously more unimpassioned at a linguistic level, particularly when the narration concerns Rodolphe's seductive talk. He tends to present facts in a plain tone and to subtly arrange the order in which they are presented so as to achieve an ironic effect. His irony, at least in this case, is more subtle than Bennett's. His treatment is generally marked by a greater cynical detachment. Flaubert's bias, although better concealed than Bennett's, is unequivocally brought to light when the passage is contrasted with his immediate close-up portrayal of the

hands of Catherine Leroux:

From the sleeves of her red blouse hung two long knotty hands. They had been so thoroughly encrusted, roughened and hardened by barn dust, washing potash and wool grease that they looked dirty even though she had rinsed them in clean water, and from long years of service they hung half open, as though humbly bearing witness to all the hardships she had endured.²⁶

There can be little doubt that here the mind of a sympathetic 'impersonal' author is tangibly at work.

A look at George Eliot's treatment of Dinah Morris, the staunch and humane Methodist preaching in the open field in Adam Bede may also throw light upon the present argument:

The villagers had pressed nearer to her, and there was no longer anything but grave attention on all faces. She spoke slowly though quite fluently, often pausing after a question, or before any transition of ideas. There was no change of attitude, no gesture; the effect of her speech was produced entirely by the inflections of her voice, and when she came to the question, 'Will God take care of us when we die?' she uttered it in such a tone of plaintive appeal that the tears came into some of the hardest eyes... she came to the words 'Lost! - sinners!' when there was a great change in her voice and manner. She had made a long pause before the exclamation, and the pause seemed to be filled by agitating thoughts that showed themselves on her features. Her pale face became paler; the circles under her eyes deepened, as they do when tears half gather without falling; and the mild, loving eyes took an expression of appalled pity, as if she had suddenly discerned a destroyed angel hovering over the heads of the people. Her voice became deep and muffled, but there was still no gesture. Nothing could be less like the ordinary type of the Ranter than Dinah. She was not preaching as she heard others preach but speaking directly from her own emotions, and under the inspiration of her own simple faith.²⁷

This is a scene comparable to Bennett's Revival meeting. An obvious difference, superficial as it may seem, is George Eliot's reiteration of the absence of gesture on the part of the preacher. In diametrical contrast to Bennett, George Eliot's attitude to the Methodist preacher is characterized by

total sympathy and admiration. If George Eliot has not been considered a realist in the sense that Bennett has, it is because of her strong tendency towards moralism and her optimistic positiveness in moral matters. Given that her *handling* of the scene itself is linguistically balanced, and, in a sense, aims at objectivity of reproduction, George Eliot is quite realistic. Bennett the professed realist, while endeavouring to reproduce a scene with a typical realist's gusto for exhaustive details and self-assigned role as a detached God-like figure, clearly failed to suppress the emotional bias that he presumably acquired in his childhood, as his commitment to the realist tenets would have led him towards that direction. If he had, his realism would have put on an even more sober, restrained, and 'not-to-take-sides' air, and critics like George Sturt would have been at an utter loss in their discussion of Bennett's work.

On page 80 of Anna, Tellwright tyrannically condemns Anna for forgetting to buy the breakfast bacon. His speech is reported in the Free-Indirect-Speech mode, which generally conveys irony.²⁸ It consists altogether of one hundred and eleven words. Since Bennett seldom presents a character's speech at such length and since were it in Indirect Speech it would certainly be syntactically awkward and mimetically inefficient, the only reasonable way left to him would seem to be Free Indirect Speech. This mode of speech presentation, like its equivalent in thought presentation, had been used by many nineteenth-century novelists, and by Flaubert on a very large scale. For the present discussion of Bennett's personal/impersonal narration, Tellwright's speech deserves a close look:

The miser began to empty himself of his anger in stormy tones that might have uprooted trees. Anna ought to feel thoroughly ashamed. He could not imagine what she had been thinking of. Why didn't she tell him she was going to the prayer meeting? Why did she go to the prayer meeting? disarranging the whole household? How came she to forget the bacon? It was gross

carelessness. A pretty example to her little sister! The fact was that *since her birthday* she had gotten above hersen. She was careless and extravagant. Look how thick the bacon was cut. He should not stand it much longer. And her finger all red, and the blood dropping on the cloth: a nice sight at a meal! Go and tie it up again.

Clearly, the narrator, as opposed to any character, is conducting the narration. This is indicated not only by the use of Free Indirect Speech itself, but also by the preceding reference to Tellwright as 'Mr Tellwright', a form of address unlikely to be used by Anna if her point of view were in control. Except the first sentence, the whole quotation is in Free Indirect Speech. It is generally agreed among stylisticians that one of the essential functions of Free Indirect Speech, as of Free Indirect Thought, is objectivity of reproduction. Yet, as Bennett the realist, like other realists of his type, is by no means uninvolved and as Free Indirect Speech often serves as an instrument for irony, it is only natural that he uses it to achieve an effect that is simultaneously mimetic and emotionally biased and, to clothe his irony with an unimpassioned appearance. Thus, the general impression the passage renders can be described as a credible reproduction of Tellwright's speech with an obvious authorial/narratorial intention of parodying and ironic distancing. The strongest indicator of its parodic effect is the eighth sentence: 'The fact was that *since her birthday* she had gotten above hersen.' Clearly apparent is an authorial effort at reproducing Tellwright's inflections – indicated by Bennett's italicizing of 'since her birthday', his colloquialism – represented by 'gotten above hersen' and the Staffordshire dialect indicated by 'hersen' to which Tellwright adheres. An ironically mimetic representation of a character's supposed utterance is effectively realized by lexical and orthographic means.

Unlike Free Indirect Thought, which was discussed earlier in connection with Bennett's use of interior monologue, Free Indirect Speech conveys no empathy on the part of the author. On the contrary, it often helps the author

to ironically distance himself from the character.²⁹ This is certainly the case with Bennett's presentation of Tellwright's speech. The effect of ironical distancing applies also to the reader-character relationship, as Leech and Short maintain: 'The irony arises because FIS [Free Indirect Speech] is normally viewed as a form where the authorial voice is interposed between the reader and what the character says, so that the reader is distanced from the character's words.'³⁰ If, in place of the first two sentences, Tellwright had said: '*You* ought to feel thoroughly ashamed. I *can* not imagine what *you have* been thinking of', the result would be Direct Speech. As the author is interposed between the reader and the character, there are syntactic shifts in terms of person and tense, 'you' to 'Anna' and 'can' to 'could' for instance. Regarding the effects of Free Indirect Speech Ullmann observes: 'Free indirect style is reported speech masquerading as narrative. It means a break in continuity and a certain shock to the reader. It is essentially an oblique construction and provides a discreet but effective vehicle for irony and ambiguity.'³¹ Since his insightful book was published in 1957, stylisticians have generally tended to agree with his argument and Bennett's irony, seen in this light, arises from the blatant break in tone in the pervasive narrative norm. Had he rendered Tellwright's utterances in Direct Speech, the result would be not only syntactic clumsiness but a garrulous intervening narrator.

There remain two other points. First, Bennett's use of Free Indirect Speech is far less frequent than Free Indirect Thought. Secondly, his use of it is on a much smaller scale than Flaubert's. Both of these characteristics can be explained by his general abstention from extremism, even on a technical plane.

There are yet other stylistic features in Bennett that invariably produce ironic effects. In his handling of the conflict between the parents' generation and the children in the Five Towns novels Bennett tends to employ the methods of the concretization and personification of abstract nouns. Given

that Bennett's sympathy is with the children, it is not surprising that the elders are treated with some special ironic stylistic tactics. On page 79 there is:

The meal began in a desolating silence. The male creature's terrible *displeasure permeated the whole room* like an ether, invisible but carrying vibrations to the heart. [My italics.]

On page 81:

Expert in all the symptoms of his moods, they [Anna and Agnes] knew that in a few hours he would begin to talk again, at first in monosyllables, and then in short detached sentences. *An intimation of relief diffused itself* through the house like a hint of spring in February. [My italics.]

The italicized words are instances of Bennett's concretization of abstract nouns. Here can be perceived a sombreness of mood and a certain degree of bitterness, and it may be assumed that this reflects his own childhood emotions. The stylistic device clearly conveys a restrained irony which tends slightly towards caricature, though curbed by Bennett so that it does not get out of hand.

As though by 1908 Bennett's bias against his parents' generation had been reasonably appeased, the mother and aunt are described in more favourable terms in The Old Wives' Tale:

They [Mrs Baines and Aunt Harriet] referred to each other as oracular sources of wisdom and good taste. *Respectability stalked abroad* when they were afoot. *The whole square wriggled uneasily* as though God's eye were peculiarly upon it.³² [My italics.]

Here, the italicized words represent the personification first of an abstract and secondly of a concrete noun. In contrast to the quotation from Anna, the general impression is that the elders are being gently teased. The irony is of a jocular kind; a mild caricature of an entertaining nature is apparent. It might not be a coincidence that Bennett uses these devices to deal with the parental

generation in his Five Towns novels. Despite his pronounced commitment to the doctrines of realism, he needed an outlet for his resentment against his elders. As a rule, *only* when he deals with this specific aspect of the Five Towns fiction does he specifically tend towards the stylistic tactics of the concretization and personification of abstract nouns.

Occasionally Bennett's irony takes on a cold cynical air:

The next day Sarah Vodrey died – she had never lived save in the fetters of slavery and fanaticism... Willie Price took a cheap lodging with the woman who had been called in on the night of Sarah's collapse. Before Christmas he was to sail for Melbourne. The Priory, deserted, gave up its rickety furniture to a van from Hanbridge, where in an auction-room, the frail sticks lost their identity in a medley of other sticks, and ceased to be. Then the bricklayer, the plasterer, the painter, and paper-hanger came to the Priory, and whistled and sang in it. (p.223.)

The last two sentences of the passage contain a subtle irony, which is not ascribable to special syntactic and semantic treatment. This is a situational irony and its detached cruelty can be fully understood only if the entire circumstances are taken into account. The Prices as 'commercial hares' have been hunted by the hounds (p.88.), even, indirectly, by Anna – their only sympathizer. Now the victimizers are about to inflict one more indignity upon the victims. They are to attain the lease of the Prices' miserable abode, which has long been in a decrepit condition and which Bennett has cynically made Anna and Mynors visit. In accordance with his fundamental pessimism and defeatism, the passage gives wilfully detailed information about the house immediately after its ownership changes. As with other realists, Bennett intends the morally despicable or mediocre to be the ones who survive and eventually triumph in the social struggle. Despite the explicit pronouncement of his fundamental 'Christ-like' compassion, there is at this specific stage of the story only a cold indulgence in the victory of the 'hounds' over the 'hares'.³³ This perverse savouring of the triumph of the morally undesirable on

the part of the 'impersonal' author is anticipated in A Man from the North. Richard Larch's literary ambition has been irretrievably frustrated by circumstances. He is soon to marry the mediocre and insensitive Laura Roberts. In an omnibus he ponders the futility of his future – a drab domestic and business life, when suddenly 'He heard the trot of the child behind him. Children ... perhaps a child of his might give sign of literary ability. If so – and surely these instincts descended, were not lost – how he would foster and encourage it!'³⁴ It is important to notice that these are the very last words of the novel. Larch's indulgence in his own defeat takes the form of the apparent hopefulness embodied by the possible literary talent of his descendents, and it is related with a superb verbal neutrality and a perfect dryness. The irony here is essentially of the same kind as that concerning the Priory. It is in no sense attributable to syntactic and semantic tactics – the author is remarkably impersonal at the linguistic level. It is, without doubt, a situational irony, simultaneously subtle, weird and cruel.

As in the case of the Priory, there are other elements in Anna that contribute to Bennett's impersonality but cannot simply be put under the category of technique. For instance, his suppression of sentimentalism. In an ordinary sense, Anna bears no resemblance to Stephen Dedalus, Mrs Ramsay or Ursula Brangwen, yet in many ways she represents a rejection of the Victorian tradition and anticipates the tumultuous modernist phenomenon that is the most salient characteristic of the literature of this century. However, there was also the likelihood of making her a stereotyped Victorian protagonist – she is passive, dutiful, and above all, sympathetic. She is not at all a Tess Durberfield, who embodies a militant anti-Victorianism in the realm of morality. By various means, Bennett successfully avoided this undesirable possibility. As has been mentioned before, at an early stage of the story, Anna shows sympathy to an imbecile sort of figure – Willie. To her, he appears all innocent,

naive, sincere; she knows that he and his father are miserable losers in the industrial/mercantile struggle; out of a natural impulse of kindness, which is not without a sexual tincture, she decides that she should somehow protect this defenceless male creature. This kindness expresses itself again on page 86, where Tellwright is explaining to Anna the desperate financial situation the Prices are in and his intention to screw the last penny from the debtors before they go bankrupt: ' "Make him bankrupt, Father?" Anna exclaimed. It was the only part of the ingenious scheme which she had understood.' Here Bennett seems to be running the risk of turning his heroine into the Victorian stereotype of all kindness and goodness. But the dialogue between the father and the daughter continues in the following light:

'Ay!' he said laconically.
 'But - ' (Would Christ have driven Titus Price into the
 bankruptcy court?)
 'If he pays, well and good.'

The bracketed sentence represents Anna's thought. It has a double effect: sardonic criticism by Anna/Bennett of the alliance of religion with a merciless mercantilism, and indication of Anna's under-developed intelligence. What might have emerged as a high scene is thus abruptly toned down and turns out a plain commonness that is rendered in a perfectly plain style. Bennett hits and runs. Anna's kindness has no moral or religious basis whatsoever. Furthermore, it is shown somehow to be the offspring of stupidity. Here there can be perceived not only some sort of a balance between the native literary tendency to instruct and a foreign cynicism but also a cold authorial detachment.

In 'The Downfall' chapter, at the end of the general disturbance in Bursley caused by Titus Price's suicide, Anna is shown to be meeting Willie, who is going to confess to her the forgery committed by his deceased father and

himself:

'Well, Miss Tellwright,' Willie began, 'I've buried him. He's gone.' The simple and profound grief, and the restrained bitterness against all the world, which were expressed in these words – the sole epitaph of Titus Price – nearly made Anna cry. She would have cried, if the cat had not opportunely jumped on her knee again; she controlled herself by dint of stroking it. She sympathized with him more intensely in that first moment of his loneliness than she had ever sympathized with anyone, even Agnes. She wished passionately to shield, shelter, and comfort him, to do something, however small, to diminish his sorrow and humiliation; and this despite his size, his ungainliness, his coarse features, his rough voice, his lack of all the conventional refinements. A single look from his guileless and timid eyes atoned for every shortcoming. Yet she could scarcely open her mouth. She knew not what to say. She had no phrases to soften the frightful blow which Providence had dealt him.(pp.193–4.)

Anna 'would have cried', but for the author's trick of introducing the cat into the scene. There is nothing to accuse her of in her stroking the cat in order to control herself. Yet the coincidence that the cat timely jumps on her knee clearly indicates Bennett's effort to reduce the sentimentality of a potentially highly sentimental scene. In the meantime, the author is drawing attention to Anna's awareness of Willie's shortcomings when all the while she is mentally lavishing motherly love and pity on him. Eventually she comes to an awkward inexpressiveness. This seems to constitute an illustration of Bennett's 'Christ-like compassion'. Yet his aesthetic commitment is at work as well. It effectively prevents the scene from becoming an effusive preaching of humanism on the part of the author/narrator. There is a muffled sense of unfulfilment, which is somehow alleviated by the tranquilizing effect of what Anna says immediately afterwards: ' "I'm sorry," she said. "You must be relieved it's all over." ' Bennett has aroused a strong expectation in the reader, but does not allow its full realization, and smoothly tones it down in the end. On page 221, Anna's attitude towards Willie is shown unmistakably to be that of a mother towards a son: 'Child of a hundred sorrows, he must be treated as

a child.' Thus, Anna's sympathy towards Willie is always treated with reservation.

Also, Anna should not be regarded as an instrument in the hands of the author for a direct argument of humanism because of her passive, though unwilling, participation in victimizing the object of her sympathy Willie. This is largely due to her inert disposition. Her being compelled by Tellwright to demand rent from the Prices is excusable, but in 'The Bazaar' chapter, her handling of Titus Price's embezzlement of fifty thousand pounds, which means further scandal for the Prices and further victimization of Willie, despite her earlier determination to 'diminish his sorrow and humiliation', is ineffective and self-deceptive and in any sense inexcusable for a perfectly humane character. She allows the secret to be shared by five persons, though she makes Mynors pay the money. Passivity, and under-developed intelligence make her only a seriously deficient image of a typical Victorian heroine. Clearly, Bennett's effort to disclaim authorial moral commitment is observable in the very conception of his character.

Bennett's attempt to suppress sentimentalism is apparent in Clayhanger as well. In the Sunday School Centenary scene, Hilda's humane act towards old Shushions who is being bullied by a petty and vulgar Albert Benbows is described in an uncanny and dry style:

'Come along , old gentleman!'
Mr Shushions did not stir.
'Now, Mr Shushions,' Hilda persuaded him in a voice
exquisitely mild, and with a lovely gesture she bent
over him...

The transformation in her amazed Edwin, who could see
tears in her eyes. The tableau of the little, silly old
man looking up, and Hilda looking down at him, with her
with her lips parted in a heavenly invitation, and one
gloved hand caressing his greenish-black shoulder and the
other mechanically holding the parasol aloft.³⁵

Hilda would have been a perfect angel of mercy in this case had Bennett

treated her in more positive terms. 'Mechanically' carries a negative connotation; 'her lips parted in a heavenly invitation' contains a mild irony, which arises chiefly from Bennett's drawing attention to the detail of Hilda's features – she is a mere human. Given that kindness is one of human qualities, Bennett's neurotic repugnance to sentimentalism is such that he even avoids a neutral treatment of a perfectly humane act – he stylistically tampers with Hilda's kindness in order to appear not to betray his artistic faith.

Despite the generally dispassionate and impersonal presentation of Anna, the way Bennett ends the story is technically conventional. He still feels the need to have an Olympian Zeus figure, or in the words of Thackeray, a puppeteer, to round off the story smoothly. Willie's suicide is unknown to any character in the novel. It is a piece of information shared between the author/narrator and the reader: 'Neither she [Anna] nor anyone in the Five Towns or elsewhere heard of Willie Price again. And well might none hear!' (pp.235–6.) The exclamation mark conveys a certain degree of complacency on the part of the author/narrator. More reliably, it serves as a strong reminder that, after all the characters have retreated backstage, a God-like personage, who is positively above and beyond the world of the Five Towns, still lingers there on the stage. Clearly, the complete effacement of authorial presence is a myth. This is the case with Flaubert, who was the first novelist to advocate the role of the author as an 'invisible god.' It is also the case with Bennett, who acted as the English spokesman of the realistic tenet of impersonality.

CHAPTER 5

THE QUEST FOR BEAUTY

In one of his frequently quoted journal entries Bennett states:

What the artist has to grasp is that there is no such thing as ugliness in this world... All ugliness has an aspect of beauty. The business of the artist is to find that beauty.¹

These remarks clearly reflect Bennett's commitment to the doctrine of French realism that whatever exists can be a proper subject for art and can be objectively represented. The assumption is that the material for art is contained in the ugly, the usual, and the prosaic and that the task of the artist is to find it and to make art out of it. The meaning of 'beauty' is always open to argument. Despite the nebulousness of the term, Bennett's conception of artistic beauty is clearly suggested in an early journal entry in which he pictorially recorded a visit to the Potteries after he had been living in London for eight years:

When I have been traversing the district after dark, the grim and original beauty of certain aspects of the Potteries has fully revealed itself for the first time... Down below is Burslem, nestled in the hollow between several hills, and showing a vague picturesque mass of bricks through its heavy pall of smoke... It is *not* beautiful in detail, but the smoke transforms its ugliness into a beauty transcending the work of architects and of time. Though a very old town, it bears no sign of great age – the eye is never reminded of its romance and history but instead it thrills and reverberates with the romance of machinery and manufacture, of the gradual taming of the earth's secret forces. And surrounding the town on every side are the long straight smoke and steam wreaths, the dull red flames, and all the visible evidences of the immense secular struggle for existence.²

In this topographical description of the Potteries lies a direct correspondence between Bennett's notion of beauty and his actual artistic practice. The Potteries were, and still are, deplorably disfigured by the single industry they

have engaged in – the manufacture of pottery. Yet, they were to be used for the setting of more than half of Bennett's novels.³

Bennett's notion of beauty, however, is not limited to topographical descriptions. It manifests itself strongly in a concern for the fundamental significance inherent in any aspect of daily human existence, however trivial it may appear. In 1901, when discussing Gissing, Bennett defined realism as an artistic concern for the usual: 'To take the common grey things which people know and despise, and, without tampering, to reveal their essential grandeur – that is realism.'⁴ He made a point in 1914 of starting from reality, and maintained that 'whatever kind of life the novelist writes about, he has been charmed and seduced by it, he is under its spell – that is, he has seen beauty in it.'⁵ In praise of A Mummer's Wife for its breaking with the tradition of English fiction he observed:

Mr Moore in this book ascetically deprived himself of all those specious aids to effect – nobility of character, feminine grace, the sudden stroke of adverse fate, lovely scenery background, splendeurs of mere event – which the most gifted of his forerunners had found useful.⁶

He noted on another occasion:

No startling events were to occur in my novel, nor anything out of the way that might bring the blush of shame to the modesty of nature; no ingenious combinations, no dramatic surprises, and above all, no coincidences. It was to be the Usual miraculously transformed by Art into the Sublime.⁷

Despite his indulgence in the repulsive and the morbid, in the manner of the French, it was to a large extent in daily human life that Bennett was to pursue artistic beauty throughout his life. His consistency on this issue was such that it may not be erroneous to assume that for him, the usual and unpromising not only could be more proper subject-matter for serious fiction than the material that is elevating in itself, but should be the only proper

subject-matter. It has been argued that mediocrity is a predominant feature of a host of important characters in Bennett's fiction. This can be related to the Clayhanger trilogy where there is observable another important aspect of Bennett's concern for the common: an extraordinary uneventfulness of plot, which reaches such a degree that it almost disappears. The Clayhanger trilogy is thickly packed with apparently insignificant incidents that may on the surface seem unrelated to each other, yet are inherently integrated into a significant whole. The elements that bring all the small incidents of the novels into a structured unity are the central characters Edwin and Hilda. There is a thorough avoidance of sudden twists in the progression of the narration. There is no longer the unexpected appearance of a fortune or the timely revelation of the noble birth of some humble figures. There is no longer the tendency to idealize, moralize and exaggerate. There is no longer sensationalism, expedience of coincidences, resort to spectacular scenes, events and characters. In fact, many conventions employed in Victorian fiction have been dispensed with.

Of course Bennett was not the sole figure of the time who positively rejected Victorian notions of the novel. George Gissing before him had drawn attention to Dickens's misrepresentation of social facts by pointing out that, Lizzie Hexam in Our Mutual Friend, born and brought up amidst the lowest circumstances, 'uses language and expresses sentiment that would do credit to a lady in whatsoever position'; and that Alice Marlow in Dombey and Son 'represents a total impossibility, the combination of base origin and squalid life, with striking mental power, strikingly developed.'⁸ Gissing was also aware of Dickens's avoidance of the disagreeable, the vulgar and the insolent as uncongenial to art. In fact, he was acting as a militant upholder of the ideal of art as opposed to the Victorian novelists' avoidance of objective truth, which, to him, and to other realists of the late nineteenth century, severely devalued

their works. Understandably, when Bennett embarked upon his literary career, he held Gissing in high esteem. Yet, despite his image as a staunch realist, Gissing frequently relapsed into the conventional approaches that he himself had criticized. Demos (1886) and The Nether World (1889) both hinge on the inheritance of a fortune for smooth plot development. Even though this can be ascribed to Gissing's strong social commitment, it is positively incompatible with Bennett's conception of realism.

In choosing ordinary, occasionally harsh facts as material for fiction, Bennett, like Moore, was playing the part of an English spokesman for the French type of realism. George Eliot and Anthony Trollope had demonstrated a similar tendency towards daily human existence, but what differentiates them from Bennett is a strong inclination to moralism in the former, and a lack of consistency in the latter. Thomas Hardy, too, is in a sense concerned with the insignificant happenings of daily human life, but his rurality, symbolism and lyrical style invariably lend a romantic flavour to his fiction. Furthermore, Hardy is not entirely immune to melodrama, as, for example, in the coincidental encounter of Mrs Charmond and Grace in the wood in The Woodlanders (1887). In contrast, Bennett shows an obsession, art-for-art's-sake as it were, with the usual and the daily, to the exclusive extent of smothering art itself. The common accusation that his fiction is dull documentary of uninteresting facts is not altogether gratuitous.

Despite his preoccupation with the daily and the common, Bennett belongs fundamentally to a convention that has an image of extremism. It would have been illogical for him to abstain entirely from indulging in the creation of repugnant scenes in the manner of the French realists and naturalists. Following in their footsteps, he shows the most unusual and most sustained taste for illness and sick-beds among all English novelists, as has been mentioned before. An extraordinarily detailed depiction of an old man in decay,

an exhaustive visualization of a corpse and lengthy portrayals of dying patients would seem to constitute the most assured sign of his being an out-and-out realist, and one of the French brand.

An old man in a pathetically crushed state would usually present an unpleasant sight for the eye. There is apparently nothing in him that one would feel compelled to call 'the beautiful'. However, in reading about old Shushions in Clayhanger, the reader not only feels a strong appeal to his instinct of pity for a fellow human being, but also experiences a kind of aesthetic satisfaction that springs from an accurate correspondence between the linguistic/artistic appearance of a fictional creature and the possible reality it represents:

The old man was changed, nearly out of recognition. The old man had lived too long; he had survived his dignity; he was now nothing but a bundle of capricious and obstinate instincts set in motion by ancient souvenirs remembered at hazard. The front of his face seemed to have given way in general collapse. The lips were in a hollow, the cheeks were concave; the eyes had receded; and there were pits in the forehead. The pale silvery straggling hairs might have been counted. The wrinkled skin was of a curious brown yellow, and the veins, instead of being blue, were outlined in Indian red. The impression given was that the flesh would be unpleasant and uncanny to the touch. The body was bent, and the neck eternally cricked backward in the effort of the eyes to look up. Moreover the old man was in a state of neglect. His beard alone proved that. His clothes were dirty and had the air of concealing dirt. And he was dressed with striking oddness. He wore boots that were not a pair. His collar was only fastened with one button, behind; the ends oscillated like wings; he had forgotten to fasten them in front; he had forgotten to put on a necktie; he had forgotten the use of buttons on all his garments. He had grown into a child again, but Providence had not provided him with a nurse. Worse than these merely material phenomena was the mumbling toothless gibber of his shrill protesting; the glassy look of idiocy from his fatigued eyes; and the insane smile and impotent frown that alternated on his features. He was a horrible and offensive old man. He was Time's obscene victim.⁹

As becomes Bennett's realistic stance, the passage renders at remarkable length and with photographic accuracy the miserable appearance

(concentrating on the face in particular) of an old man advancing irreversibly towards death. What strikes one most is the relentless thoroughness with which the author assembles the physical details of Shushions. In an overwhelming consentaneity, the words 'hollow', 'concave', 'receded', 'pits', belonging to different grammatical categories and describing respectively Shushions's lips, cheeks, eyes, and forehead, convey a horrifying physiological withering that evokes the vision of the skull of a skeleton. His hairs are not grey, but morbidly white, characterized by a weird scarcity. His skin is wrinkled. The veins on it are of gruesome colours. His trunk and neck are warped. His clothes are more than dirty. His dress in general is in a state of pathetic neglect and oddity. Here, Bennett arrives at a point of nauseousness that he seldom attains elsewhere. Even though it is now generally assumed that realism is undesirable because it has a materialistic leaning and that its photographic method is essentially inadequate, Bennett the realist has accomplished one of the most unusual artistic feats that narrative fiction as a conceptual, as opposed to visual, medium can possibly accomplish – the effective transmission of a scene in its totality and with exceeding accuracy. In this process of transmitting the repugnance of his raw material into fiction, Bennett the novelist is experiencing 'the relief of his feelings'. He is drawing the aesthetic satisfaction of reproduction from the very act of reproduction.¹⁰ Because of the accuracy and thoroughness in rendering the various visual data of Shushions, the reader is in an adequate position to share the same aesthetic experience as the author – it is a two-way productive/receptive situation.

The above account suggests a certain art-for-art's-sake on the part of Bennett. Does he heap up a multitude of unpleasant physical details merely for the sake of churning out unpleasantness? Is there any moral commitment in this artistic/linguistic tour de force? Such questions had often been asked

of the French realists. The first two sentences of the passage are obviously authorial comments. By means of an ironic tone, Bennett efficiently restrains the pathos inherent in the issue of old age. The last two sentences further strengthen the motif, which is then immediately expanded into a direct powerful expression of Bennett's humanism. The omniscient author/narrator reveals information about Shushions's past life which is unknown to the chief reflector of the novel Edwin, and thereby criticizes all concerned:

Thus was the doddering old fool who had given his youth to Sunday schools when Sunday schools were not patronized by princes, archbishops, and lord mayors, when Sunday schools were the scorn of the intelligent, and had sometimes to be held in public houses for lack of better accommodation – thus was he taken off for a show and a museum curiosity by indulgent and shallow Samaritans who had not even the wit to guess that he had sown what they were reaping. And Darius Clayhanger stood oblivious at a high window of the sacred Bank. And Edwin, who, all unconscious, owed the very fact of his existence to the doting imbecile, regarded him chiefly as a figure in a tableau, as the chance instrument of a woman's beautiful revelation. Mr Shushions's sole crime against society was that he had forgotten to die.¹¹

Darius, who had been saved from a flogging in the workhouse Bastille by Shushions in the 1840s, is now being criticized for his apathy towards the old man's misery. Edwin, who owes his very existence to Shushions, is upbraided for the same reason. In fact, the whole Wesleyan community of the five towns is castigated. The entire situation is a tragedy where a benefactor is eventually fraining victimized by those who have benefited from him.

Although a French realist usually maintains an appearance of restraining from moral commitment in his work, his dedicated attitude towards art itself implies a moral commitment to the values of truth, honesty and sincerity. It is in his refusal to idealize and elevate, and in his unrelenting devotion to objective and impartial description and analysis that he takes a moral stance. This applies only partially to Bennett. Into French realism's emphasis on artistic

detachment, which Bennett largely retains, as here in the depiction of Shushions, he has incorporated a native moral tendency to instruct, and has thereby avoided the impression of aesthetic extravagance, of which the French realists and naturalists have often been accused. The result is equally good art but unequivocal moral commitment – once it is granted that literature is to serve the function of enhancing the spirit, and improving the conditions, material as well as moral, of society. In his truthful portrayal of the unpleasant features of old Shushions, Bennett has not only found artistic beauty but also expressed a cogent appeal, modest, as it were, compared with the Victorian novelists, for less social ugliness. His appeal would have been less cogent had he not so thoroughly and accurately portrayed the abject state that old Shushions is in.

Just as Bennett could dwell lingeringly upon the physical details of a withered old man, so he could indulge in the description of a corpse with even greater gusto. In The Old Wives' Tale, after a separation of thirty years, Sophia is eventually confronted with the body of her husband Scales:

This face on the bed was painfully, pitifully old. A withered face, with the shiny skin all drawn into wrinkles! The stretched skin under the jaw was like the skin of a plucked fowl. The cheek-bones stood up, and below them were deep hollows, almost like egg-cups. A short, scraggy white beard covered the lower part of the face. The hair was scanty, irregular, and quite white; a little white hair grew in the ears. The shut mouth obviously hid toothless gums, for the lips were sucked in. The eyelids were as if pasted down over the eyes, fitting them like kid. All the skin was extremely pallid; it seemed brittle. The body, whose outlines were clear under the sheet, was very small, thin, shrunk, pitiable as the face. And on the face was a general expression of final fatigue, of tragic and acute exhaustion; such as made Sophia pleased that the fatigue and exhaustion had been assuaged in rest, while all the time she kept thinking to herself horribly: 'Oh! how tired he must have been.'¹²

As in the case of Shushions, the focus of the depiction is upon the face, which is portrayed in an even more thorough-going manner – Bennett uses 78 words

to describe Shushions's face; for that of the dead Scales, 126. The picture produces an appalling effect. Bennett could have merely informed the reader that Scales is dead. He could have made the scene less repulsive. Both possibilities would have meant infidelity to his artistic faith. His attitude is in contrast to that of Victorian novelists. In his discussion of Victorian fiction in relation to painting, Mario Praz rightly remarks of Dickens: 'He is debarred from true realism partly by his tendency towards theatricalism (he is a scene-painter rather than a scrupulous, notary-like annotator *à la* Balzac...), partly by his Victorian repugnance for everything that is crude and offensive to delicacy.'¹³ Bennett's intention is to faithfully transmit the scene to the reader in its entirety, with all its gruesomeness and in defiance of social propriety, presumably according to some actual model or models that had left gnawing impressions in his artistic mind and the relief of which was to reproduce them in fiction, as the French realists had done. The result is a language feat hardly surpassed elsewhere in his work and comparable to Manet's *The Dead Toreador*, though the painting is not meant to horrify. Like Shushions's, Scales's face is pathetically old and withered. It is rendered with a host of death-related images that gives one a creepy shudder and produces a sustained hideousness.

The building-up of the grotesque face thus completed, attention is then drawn towards Sophia. She has experienced a serious shock at the first sight of the corpse. Immediately afterwards she is shown to be pondering the precise age of her deceased husband, and to be watching him as though he were a physical object. The entire process of this visual construction is realized from her point of view. Yet she is made to appear quite unmoved by the scene and she is even described as 'pleased' that her husband's 'acute exhaustion' has at last come to an end in death. Her contemplation is given a further account:

She was not sorry that Gerald had wasted his life, nor that he was a shame to his years and to her. The manner of his life was of no importance. What affected her was that he had once been young, and that he had grown old, and was now dead. That was all. Youth and vigour had come to that. Youth and vigour always came to that. He had ill-treated her; he had abandoned her; he had been a devious rascal; but how trivial were such accusations against him! The whole of her huge and bitter grievance against him fell to pieces and crumbled.¹⁴

Scales has been a rascal, but now, standing in front of his dead body, Sophia is neither mourning over it nor offering positive forgiveness for the wrong it has done her. She virtually ignores her husband's villainy. She is shown to be soberly pondering his life, which she decides to have been wasted and to be of no significance. Moreover, she begins to dwell upon the pathos of growing old, in which she soon becomes absorbed. Thus, the entire process of creating the picture of a corpse is made to appear no more than a mere interruption of Sophia's continuous thinking. The impassive objectivity of Sophia the reflector can in fact be identified with that of Bennett the author. Its effect is an adequate expression of an utter indifference manifest in the imagery of death itself. The body is thereby rendered simply as a visual fact, a sheer inanimate thing, devoid of social values. Bennett actually makes Sophia experience 'a pure and primitive emotion, uncoloured by any moral or religious quality.'¹⁵

This impression is further strengthened through the interruption of Sophia's thought by the entrance into the room where Scales's corpse is kept of the Manchester businessman Till Boldero, a friend of Scales's. By offering Sophia tea he starts a conversation that strikes an unmistakable tone of casualness:

She followed him downstairs into the parlour. He poured out a cup of tea.

'I was forgetting,' she said. 'I am forbidden tea. I mustn't drink it.'...

'Then what can I get you?'

'If I could have just milk and water,' she said meekly.

Mr Boldero emptied the cup into the slop basin, and began to fill it again.

'Did he tell you anything?' she asked, after a considerable silence.

'Nothing,' said Mr Boldero in his low, soothing tones.

'Nothing except that he had come from Liverpool. Judging from his shoes I should say that he must have walked a good bit of the way.'¹⁶

Sophia's response to Boldero's unimpassioned attitude is marked by a comparable indifference. By presenting the scene in this manner, Bennett firmly anchors the experience of death to the concrete contemporary social circumstances in which it occurs. The profound issue of life and death is waywardly juxtaposed against the banality of daily life – a practice that helps to convey a cynical air that characterizes so many of the realist writers and realist painters in nineteenth-century France. Yet, Bennett restrains himself from falling into the kind of perversity apparent in Edmond Goncourt's photographic attempt to record minutely the death of his own brother. In this case, he makes Sophia weep at the sight of her deceased husband's clothes:

Sophia saw a small pile of clothes on a chair. She examined the suit, which was still damp, and its woeful shabbiness pained her. The linen collar was nearly black, its stud of bone. As for the boots, she had noticed such boots on the feet of tramps. She wept now. These were the clothes of him whom had once been a dandy living at the rate of fifty pounds a week.¹⁷

In accordance with the general moderation of Bennett's realism, death is here granted social meaning, which consists in the pathos of a once prodigal commercial traveller having ended up as a poor tramp rather than his death itself. Middle-class respectability has been relegated to the humble status of vagabondism, and then, as Bennett's exhaustive description shows, to a repulsive mass of inanimate bones and flesh. It should be noticed that the attention drawn towards the social connotations of Scales's death does not on the whole undermine Bennett's ultra-realistic stance in his treatment of the

corpse. The imagery of death is rendered in a manner as though it was an independent work of art existing all on its own and conveying a simple visual fact of utter repugnance.

A further manifestation of Bennett's dwelling upon the ugly and the unpleasant in lengthy detail is his obsession with illness, which is present in a large proportion of his total output of fiction. This obsession has been noticed by some critics, though insufficient attention has been paid to its French origin. Early in A Man from the North, Bennett gives a minute description of the sick Mr Aked, who is dying of consumption when Larch comes to visit him:

He [Larch] was conscious of nothing but a loud sound of rapid, painful breathing, accompanied by moans and a strange rattling which came to his ears with perturbing distinctness... 'Larch - did you say - why - didn't he come - before?' The tones were less unnatural than he had anticipated, but it seemed that only by the exercise of a desperate ingenuity could the speaker interject the fragments of a sentence here and there between his hurrying gasps... The patient, supported by pillows, was sitting upright in bed, and as Richard entered he looked towards the door with the expression of an unarmed man on the watch for an assassin. His face was drawn and duskily pale, but on each cheek burned a red flush; at every cruel inspiration the nostrils dilated widely, and the shoulders were raised in a frenzied effort to fill the embarrassed lungs.¹⁸

Similar to the cases of Shushions and Scales, the depiction is marked by a determination to attain verisimilitude. To add to the disagreeable sickliness of the scene, Bennett makes Adeline, the patient's niece and Larch's lover at a later stage of the story, catch influenza and remain bed-ridden for weeks.

In Anna, soon after Titus Price has committed suicide, his house-keeper Sarah Vodrey collapses from pericarditis and pleurisy, both of which follow from her rheumatism. The state in which she lies in her sick-bed immediately before her death is portrayed with the clinical precision that is characteristic of the sick-bed scenes of many realists: 'Sarah's wrinkled and seamed face had the flush of fever, and the features were drawn into the expression of a

terrible anxiety; her hands hung loose; she breathed like a dog after a run.¹⁹ In The Old Wives' Tale John Baines is paralysed and bed-ridden from the very beginning of the novel and dies as a direct result of Sophia's brief dereliction after fourteen years of unceasing attendance by his family. Samuel Povey, with his flat chest and chronic cough, defies the weather in his comically heroic attempt to obtain an acquittal for his murderer cousin and thereby catches pneumonia - 'acute double pneumonia'. The unpleasant manner of his breathing when dying is accurately described, although in a wryly casual tone:

She [Constance] heard within that mysterious box a rapid succession of thin, dry, crackling sounds: sounds such as she would have produced by rubbing her hair between her fingers close to her ear. The crepitation ceased, then recommenced, and she perceived that it coincided with the intake of his breath. He coughed; the sounds were intensified; a spasm of pain ran over his face; and he put his damp hand to his side. 'Pain in my side!' he whispered with difficulty.²⁰

Constance in her old age suffers from sciatica and has to lie in bed. Her determination to do her share in the vote against the federation of the five small towns drives her out of the sick-bed into the street. Fatigued by the efforts involved, she catches a 'chill', the direct outcome of which is rheumatic fever. She is subjected to 'formidable pain'. Yet she dies a few days later not of 'acute rheumatism', but of a supervening pericarditis.

Apart from the above cases, Bennett tends to present two or more characters falling ill at the same time, the result being an intensification of the general sense of morbidity, as has already been shown in the case of the Akeds. In Leonora, Hannah Myatt has a heart attack when Leonora and her family are at a dance party. Her brother Meshach Myatt, who has never been ill in his life, runs to the household of their niece for help. Due to uraemia, he falls suddenly at the doorway. Hannah Myatt dies. Meshach recovers only after careful medical treatment and days of anxious care by his relatives. In

Riceyman Steps, in the morbid atmosphere of the second-hand bookshop T. T. Riceyman, a sick wife has to attend a sick husband. Having made desperate efforts to persuade Henry Earlfoward the miser, who is already dangerously ill, to go to the hospital, Violet Earlfoward collapses. She is sent to the hospital and diagnosed to have a fibroid growth in the matrix. Operated on, she fails to survive the operation, as she has long been undernourished. At home, Elsie the servant is watching over Henry Earlfoward when her lover Joe, mentally disturbed by shell-shock during the war, unexpectedly returns to her after a long period of absence. At this critical moment, he is suffering from malarial fever. Thus, Elsie has to look after the two patients under the same roof. Henry Earlfoward still refuses to be hospitalized, and finally dies of stomach cancer.

Despite Bennett's apparent inclination towards disease for its own sake, his sick-bed scenes are frequently of great structural significance to the development of the story as a whole, as Thomas J. Roberts's detailed study shows. Roberts rightly points out that the sudden illness of Meshach Myatt creates suspense regarding who is going to inherit the Myatt fortune, John Stanway or Fred Ryley. This can make the difference between bankruptcy and success for the former. Myatt's disease also provides an occasion for the revelation to Leonora of her husband's temptation to murder Myatt, blotting out the last residue of her love for him and preparing the reader for sympathy towards Arthur Twemlow's courtship of Leonora.²¹

Pursued further, Bennett's concern with disease extends into an explicit expression in Hilda Lessways of a view that suffering, mental as well as physical, is of positive significance. Mrs Lessways has never been in good health and dies rather suddenly of peritonitis caused by a perforating cancer. Her attitude towards her own illness can be seen from the remarks of the author/narrator: 'Mrs Lessways had contracted a severe cold in the head, a

malady to which she was subject and which she accepted with fatalistic submission, even pleurably giving herself up to it, as a martyr to the rack.²² Towards the end of his career, Bennett observed in The Savour of Life (1928): 'Life for me has many savours, which I relish keenly. Therefore many subjects interest me... and I always write as well as heaven permits.'²³ This confession might seem to be the expression of a deviant version of the beauty doctrine of French realism. Evidence shows that Bennett was also subject to the philosophical influences of Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius. Presumably, Bennett had read them early in his youth. There are quite a few references to both philosophers in his journal. The entry for 16th September, 1907 reads: 'I could not sleep well last night, nor the night before; and not all Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius could ensure cheerfulness and perfect equanimity.'²⁴ He wrote on 3 April, 1908: 'Every morning just now I say to myself: *Today*, not tomorrow, is the day you have to live, to be happy in... Sheer M. Aurelius, of course.'²⁵ This personal conviction is fully expressed in Bennett's fictional figures. While on holiday on the Isle of Man, Anna watches the moon rising in the east and experiences a sudden sensation of the 'interestingness' of life: 'The sense of universal quiescence increased... She perceived that the monotony, the austerity, and the melancholy of her existence had been sweet and beautiful of its kind... Nothing was ugly nor mean. Beauty was everywhere, in everything.'²⁶ As early as 1895-97, this belief had found its way into A Man from the North. When Larch is taking care of the dying Aked, he 'suddenly conceived a boundless respect for the nurse, who had watched whole nights by this tortured organism on the bed. Somehow existence began to assume for him a new and larger aspect... he abased himself before all the doctors and nurses; they alone tasted the true savour of life.'²⁷ Later, in Clayhanger, Edwin cannot help admiring the Orgreaves' enlightened way of life, which is in contrast to the puritanism practised by the majority of the Bursley

inhabitants: 'Live to the uttermost instant and to the last flicker of energy.'²⁸ The narrator of 'The Matador of the Five Towns', who is not a native of the region, makes a positively favourable comment on it despite all its ugliness: 'I enjoyed all this. All this seemed to me to be fine. I would have altered nothing in it. Mean, ugly, squalid, crude, barbarian - yes.'²⁹ In These Twain, the discovery that the musical bachelor Tertius Ingpen has a mistress leads Edwin to realize that romance is not a monopoly of such big cities as Manchester or Birmingham, but exists in the dull Five Towns life as well: 'Edwin was impressed anew by the revelation of romance which had concealed itself in the squalid dailiness of the Five Towns.'³⁰

A most radical manifestation of this conviction of Bennett's is to be found in Hilda Lessways, where misfortune, shame, and fear are all accorded positive values:

In her [Hilda's] unhappiness she was blest. She savoured her unhappiness. She drank it down passionately.³¹

She was afraid, but her fear was pleasurable. She was ashamed, but her shame was pleasurable.³²

Even greed may seem to be a virtue: 'She gloated...over her savings. The more money she amassed, the less willing was she to spend. The nascent avarice amused her.'³³ A disaster in the ordinary sense can be viewed in an entirely new light. Hilda's realization of the bigamous nature of her marriage to George Cannon leads only to her pride in him. Furthermore: 'In the general havoc of the shock she began to be proud also of herself, because it was the mysterious power of her individuality that had originated the disaster.'³⁴ Bennett's tendency to dwell on sufferings is observable in his last substantial novel Imperial Palace as well. Evelyn Orchem has been put into an awkward situation by the egocentric Gracie, yet: 'He was happy as well as distracted. The situation was terrible, but it was terribly flattering, and there was beauty

in it, and beauty communicated itself to the whole environment.'³⁵ Thus, in this wilful rejoicing in one's own suffering and misfortune culminates Bennett's canon of the 'interestingness' of existence. This can be ascribed to the influence of Oscar Wilde as well as to that of the Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius. In De Profundis (1905) Wilde maintains that suffering has its significance, its function in human existence:

While there were times when I rejoiced in the idea that my sufferings were to be endless, I could not bear them to be without meaning. Now I find hidden somewhere away in my nature something that tells me that nothing in the world is meaningless, and suffering least of all.³⁶

Evidence shows that Bennett was acquainted with the work of Wilde early in his youth and that he continued to read him long after he himself had started his literary career. Into Bennett's original apprenticeship to the realists and naturalists were already transfused elements of Stoicism and aestheticism. This theoretical overlapping does not on the whole undermine Bennett's over-all realistic stance. The teachings of the Stoics and the aesthetes are in a certain sense not uncongenial to the beauty tenet of realism. Taking into consideration the overwhelming formative power of French realism on the youthful Bennett's mind, it may safely be assumed that it was his strong orientation towards the realists that made this overlapping possible, rather than the other way around. Whatever the influences, Bennett's artistic beauty realizes itself not only in his concern with the usual and his creation of unpleasant scenes, but also in a positive delight in suffering.

CHAPTER 6

ART AND REALITY

While it is not quite true that the realists proceeded precisely by the methods of natural science, they did share in, admire and seek to imitate many of scientific attitudes. It is this inclination that largely determines the character and quality of their work: impassivity, impartiality, total rejection of metaphysical or epistemological prejudice, scrupulous observation and notation of empirical phenomena, descriptions of *how*, not why, things happen in their specific ways. These qualities have aroused a great deal of controversy, as the previous argument has shown, and they are all apparent in Bennett's fiction. Bennett can certainly linger over the ugly for its own sake, there are nevertheless abundant occasions in his work where there is manifest only a sincere effort at a plain representation of plain facts. Although the emphasis is upon his faithfulness to his ideal of art, the previous account of his portrayals of old Shushions, the corpse of Scales, and the death-bed scenes, clearly indicates an outright attempt at objectivity of reproduction. A more concentrated illustration of this effort is to be found in Bennett's descriptions of interiors. These in fact constitute an area for which he shows an unusual fondness. None of his serious works is without some lengthy, photographic or documentary depiction of rooms. The underground kitchen of the Baineses in The Old Wives' Tale is one such example:

This kitchen, Maggie's cavern home, had the mystery of a church, and on dark days it had the mystery of a crypt. The stone steps leading down to it from the level of earth were quite unlighted. You felt for them with the feet of faith, and when you arrived in the kitchen, the kitchen, by contrast, seemed luminous and gay; the architect may have considered and intended this effect of the staircase. The kitchen saw day through a wide, shallow window whose top touched the ceiling and whose bottom had been out of the girls' reach until long after they had begun to go to school. Its panes were small; about half of them were of the 'knot' kind, through which no

object could be distinguished; the other half were of a later date, and stood for the march of civilization. The view from the window consisted of the plate-glass windows of the newly built Sun vaults, and of passing legs and skirts. A strong wire grating protected any excess of illumination, and also protected the glass from the caprices of wayfarers in King Street. Boys had a habit of stopping to kick with their full strength at the grating. Forget-me-nots on a brown field ornamented the walls of the kitchen. Its ceiling was irregular and grimy, and a beam ran across it; in this beam were two hooks; from these hooks had once depended the ropes of a swing, much used by Constance and Sophia in the old days before they were grown up. A large range stood out from the wall between the stairs and the window. The rest of the furniture comprised a table – against the wall opposite the range – a cupboard, and two Windsor chairs. Opposite the foot of the steps was a doorway, without a door, leading to two larders, dimmer even than the kitchen, vague retreats made visible by whitewash, where bowls of milk, dishes of cold bones, and remainders of fruit-pies, reposed on stillages; in the corner nearest the kitchen was a great steen in which the bread was kept. Another doorway on the other side of the kitchen led to the first coal-cellar, where was also the slopstone and tap, and thence a tunnel took you to the second coal-cellar, where coal and ashes were stored; the tunnel proceeded to a distant, infinitesimal yard, and from the yard, by ways behind Mr Critchlow's shop, you could finally emerge, astonished, upon Brougham street. The sense of the vast-obscure of those regions which began at the top of kitchen steps and ended in black corners of larders or abruptly in the common dailiness of Brougham Street, a sense which Constance and Sophia had acquired in infancy, remained with them almost unimpaired as they grew old.¹

As is frequently the case with Bennett, the description is rendered in a sober and restrained tone, occasionally mingled with the author/narrator's explanations and comments. No matter whether it is plain depiction or authorial assertion, the information revealed is focused overwhelmingly upon the visual aspect of the place. In other words, the author's intention is to present various visual data of the kitchen in a thorough-going manner, apparently allowing no single detail to escape, so as to build up a scene with a maximum degree of credibility and verisimilitude. In order to render effectively the intended scene, the author appeals to the reader's imagination by using various figures of speech. Thus the mysteriousness of the place is compared to that of a church and a crypt, and the comparison is quite

balanced and free from any suspicion of distortion or exaggeration. The stone steps are accorded much attention and might well have been modelled upon some factual ones that had impressed Bennett the child deeply. In a similar description of a similar place in A Man from the North, Adeline's childhood abode is said to have an 'unusual number of staircases'. The window, with its two kinds of panes, is rendered in great detail. A cinematic effect is produced when the author/narrator invites the reader to have a look through its natural frame to view the 'passing legs and skirts'. The walls are mentioned together with their decorations. The ceiling has a beam running across it. In the beam are two hooks that have a history of considerable significance. Then the range. Then a restrained cataloguing of the furniture. The two larders, with all their proper contents, and the two cellars, with their respective functions specified, are given due attention.

The Baineses' kitchen represents a case where Bennett aims at an extensive and comprehensive account of a scene in order to establish a domestic milieu which is of paramount importance to the artistic unity of the story. Two distinct features emerge from the above account. First, a photographic notation of the details of a place with an effort at the greatest possible degree of verisimilitude, occasionally accompanied by narratorial explanations and comments that warmly invite the reader to share the author's experience. Secondly, the construction of the scene with a careful avoidance of the simultaneous physical involvement of any characters – the physiques of Bennett's fictional figures are usually given a separate treatment, as the previous account of Shushions and Elsie show. A similar case is to be found in Bennett's description of the Tellwrights' kitchen in Anna. Whereas authorial assertion is not a recurrent phenomenon in his portrayals of interiors, objectivity of reproduction and absence of characters from the scene are universal qualities of Bennett's approach. Examples can be found in his

presentation of the Tellwright parlour, Hilda's boarding-house in Brighton, Darius's sitting room and Larch's dwelling place when he first arrives in London. Evidence can also be provided from The Pretty Lady and Whom God hath Joined. The second feature of Bennett's portrayal of the Baineses' kitchen is of special interest because it raises the question why he shuts his characters out of these descriptions. He could well have placed his fictional figures in a scene without dispensing with physical objects, as Dickens does in the opening passage of Dombey and Son:

Dombey sat in the corner of the darkened room in the great arm-chair by the bedside, and Son lay tucked up warm in a little basket bedstead, carefully disposed on a low settee immediately in front of the fire and close to it, as if his constitution were analogous to that of muffin, and it was essential to toast him brown while he was very new.²

Although Dickens's narration is focused upon the people, a considerable amount of information of the physical background is released simultaneously. Thomas Hardy uses the same method in The Mayor of Casterbridge.³ Bennett himself occasionally adopted a similar approach, as in the 'Domesticity Invaded' chapter of Hilda Lessways:

When she inserted herself between the exposed face of the wardrobe and its door, she was precipitated into the most secret intimacy of her mother's existence. There was the familiar odour of old kid gloves... She was more intimate with her mother than she could ever be in talking to her. The lower part of this section of the wardrobe consisted of three deep drawers with inset brass handles, an exquisitely exact piece of mahogany cabinet-work. From one of the drawers a bit of white linen untidily protruded. Her mother! The upper part was filled with sliding trays, each having a raised edge to keep the contents from falling out... Quantities of various card-boxes!⁴

Since Hilda's point of view is positively in control, it would seem impossible not to mingle the visual data concerning the wardrobe with the narration of her feelings when she discovers her mother's privacy. The passage is of

interest because while the heroine is in a foregrounded position, a considerable amount of detailed information about the wardrobe is disclosed at the same time. However, it is unusual for Bennett to reveal detailed information about a physical setting when he is concentrating primarily on the action of a character. A strong inclination to deal with people and physical objects separately is manifest in all Bennett's serious fiction.

This tendency towards a separation of people and things in description provides a substantial explanation of Virginia Woolf's accusation that Bennett was conventional in his portrayal of character. In her historic manifesto of the new art Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown (1924), Bennett is depicted as a dull realist preoccupied with externals and incapable of penetrating the internal domain of human existence, which Woolf proclaims as essential for an adequate conception of characters for the modern novelist, arguing that human character had changed around the year 1910. The imaginary figure Mrs Brown is travelling in a railway carriage from Richmond to Waterloo, and 'Mr Bennett... would keep his eyes in the carriage. He, indeed, would observe every detail with immense care. He would notice the advertisements, the pictures of Swanage-Portsman; the way in which the cushion bulged between the buttons; how Mrs Brown wore a brooch which had cost three-and-ten-three at Whitworth's bazaar.'⁵ Having reproached Bennett for his obsession with physical details, Woolf proceeds to assault his handling of Hilda Lessways and maintains that 'he is trying to hyponotise us into the belief that, because he has made a house, there must be a person living there.'⁶ Despite the justice that Woolf does to Bennett's artistic skill and perception, her case is weakened by her excessive zeal about the new art which she assumes that she and certain other like-minded novelists were upholding. There can be little doubt that Bennett belongs to a different literary convention, but his primary concern is certainly with people rather than 'cushions', 'buttons' and 'brooches'.

Because he is creating a person, he has to make him a house which suits and reflects his character rather than the other way around. The house is meaningfully integrated into the story as an artistic whole, so much so that it can be regarded as part of the character.

With Woolf's manifesto may be compared a sort of artistic pronouncement that Bennett put into his first novel. Mr Aked, Larch's literary friend and teacher, having explained to him the romance inherent even in an ugly suburb, proceeds to declare:

Note the varying indications supplied by bad furniture seen through curtained windows... Listen to the melodies issuing lamely from ill-tuned pianos... Even in the thin smoke ascending unwillingly from invisible chimney-pots, the flutter of a blind, the bang of a door, the winking of a fox terrier perched on a window-sill, the colour of paint, the lettering of a name - in all these things there is character and matter of interest - truth waiting to be expounded.⁷

Elsewhere, Bennett maintains: 'It is...true that the carriage and gestures are the reflection of the soul. Had one eyes, the tying of a boot-lace is the reflection of the soul.'⁸ Anchored to his own literary convictions, Bennett did pay a great deal of attention to the physical details of material phenomena. Yet it is unfair to over-emphasize this aspect of him. It is absurd to neglect the social and moral reverberations of externals in his fiction. Bennett's interest in the physical aspects of things, as in the case of the French realists, and more obviously, of his own meticulous portrayals of the disagreeable appearances of certain characters, is always with reference to what they can reveal about the mentality of, and relations between, people. His treatment of Anna's kitchen, with its long list of objects and the various qualities they possess, shows her inclination towards order and cleanliness. This in turn expresses her strong sense of duty, to her younger sister Agnes as well as to her father Tellwright, and her stoical subjection to an austere domestic environment and Tellwright's

parental tyranny. The kitchen serves yet another function. It is not only an image of a would-be dutiful wife, but also a concrete embodiment of discreet wealth, with all its physical substantiality, being pursued by Mynors, who represents the materialistic social ambience of the Five Towns. It is not really a woman that Mynors is chasing but rather an object: the entire description of the kitchen is significantly inserted into one of the important scenes concerning his courtship of Anna.

Bennett's handling of the Baineses' kitchen is a similar case. As has been argued in Chapter 3, it exerts a sense of repression, melancholy, and utter constraint. Through it, the narrow mentality of the older generation of the Baineses and of the Five Towns at large is clearly seen in a miniature form. Furthermore, as it is presented to the reader at the outset of the novel, it proleptically suggests, again through the impression of darkness and a sense of confinement, the eventual destiny of the twin heroines Constance and Sophia. If at this stage of the story they are vivacious and even rebellious in spirit, their mentality turns out towards the end of their lives to display the same kind of limitation that characterizes the place where they played so often in their childhood. Bennett can portray an interior with painstaking care. It stands on its own so long as it is conceived in strict terms of objectivity of reproduction. However, when seen within the artistic frame of the story as a whole, it invariably means much more than it would when viewed as a separate piece of description.

Just as there is a strong orientation towards the internal sphere of human existence and towards the stream-of-consciousness technique in Bennett's fiction, Woolf, despite the undeniable originality of her new approach, did not dispense with the careful depiction of physical details in her own novels, and moreover, had to deal with them with 'immense care'. Concerning her prescribed model character in Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown Samuel Hynes

argues: 'if we examine Mrs Brown carefully, we will find that she is put together in pretty much the same way that Hilda is, out of physical descriptions and details of a characteristic environment; "I thought of her in a seaside house, among queer ornaments" is not unlike Bennett's account of Hilda's house.'⁹ The difference between Bennett and Woolf would seem to lie to a large extent in the ways they reveal information. Whereas Bennett usually presents visual data about a house without diversion, Woolf, like other novelists of her period, tends to incorporate them into the narration. There are obvious cases where she reveals physical details of a place in a fairly concentrated manner:

She [Mrs Ramsay] looked up...and saw the room, saw the chairs, thought them fearfully shabby. Their entrails...were all over the floor... Mats, camp-beds, crazy ghosts of chairs and tables whose London life of service was done - they did well enough here; and a photograph or two, and books... Things got shabbier and shabbier summer after summer. The mat was fading, the wall paper was flapping. You couldn't tell any more that those were roses on it... What was the use of flinging a green Cashmere shawl over the edge of a picture frame? ... The drawing-room door was open; the hall door was open; it sounded as if the bedroom doors were open; and certainly the window on the landing was open... She would go into the maids' bedrooms at night and find them sleep like ovens.¹⁰

This passage is extracted from a space of less than one and a half pages of To the Lighthouse (1927). Despite the diversions, which are not quoted, and the fact that it is presented largely through Mrs Ramsay's thought process and that the focus of Woolf's message transmission might not necessarily be on the physical objects themselves (in the case of the doors, it is on the specific state they are in), a considerable amount of information required for an adequate establishment of the setting has been revealed within a short space and in a manner even of cataloguing. The place is shabby, but big. It contains a number of rooms; the furniture's past merit is mentioned; the wall paper is peeling off and, although it is faded, its pattern can still be discerned; there is

a picture on the wall; it is not only framed but also has a shawl hanging over it, and the shawl is green of colour and Cashmere of texture. However, the overall impression is that the information about the place is psychologically unforegrounded, even when conceived in a compressed form. It is highly possible that Woolf modelled the Ramsays' seaside house upon the Stephens' holiday abode in Cornwall where she had spent summer holidays in her childhood. Her creation in 1927 of the Ramsays' house, which is full of 'queer ornaments', could well be regarded as a realization of the project that she had born in mind three years earlier in Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown. To the Lighthouse is now generally regarded as her most important novel containing all the qualities of her new approach. Yet, in some respect it still carries traits of the novelists of Bennett's type. What raises her up above the apparently doomed convention would seem to be only a matter of greater subtlety in message transmission. Just as the knitting of the 'reddish-brown stocking' is made a recurrent image to establish the full visual identity of Mrs Ramsay – it in fact constitutes an inseparable part of her whole person – so the physical aspects of the Ramsay holiday abode in the Isle of Skye needed to be portrayed in detail. This is done at a stage fairly close to the opening of the story, as many of the important scenes of the novel are to take place within the house. In this sense, Woolf employs a method fairly similar to that of Bennett. She does not build a house in order that a person may live in it, but neither does Bennett. After all, the dissimilarity between the two novelists is not as enormous as has usually been assumed.

Bennett's specification of details has been shown to be meaningful and his particular approach, contrasted with that of Woolf, not unjustifiable, but the question why he tends to separate people and things in description still remains unanswered. In Balzac's novels, the physical milieu of a place is usually described separately, yet the authorial voice is so sonorous that the

reader may well suspect that he is not describing, but narrating it. In Bennett, as in many of the later French realists, there can be discerned a dynamic artistic impulse towards the achievement through language of life-like visual effects comparable to those of a realistic painting or portrait. In his comment on Post-Impressionism in 1910, Bennett drew attention to the possible interpenetration of the fine arts and literature:

The exhibition of the so-called 'Neo-Impressionism' over which the culture of London is now laughing, has an interest which is perhaps not confined to the art of painting. For me, personally, it has a slight, vague repercussion upon literature.¹¹

Commenting upon another art exhibition in May 1927, he expressed his views on the role that art should play in human life:

The Tate has some of the worst, and a few of the best, pictures publicly exhibited in London... According to my observation, the worst draw rather more attention than the best. This disturbs me, has a tendency to undermine my faith in mankind. And I am disturbed also by the dull, sluggish, impenetrable faces of the strollers in the galleries. Do the galleries, established and maintained at such expense, favourably influence the souls behind the faces?¹²

Biographical sources indicate that there was a strain of artistry in the Bennett family. Bennett, together with his brothers and sisters, was strongly interested in the arts in his childhood and studied water-colour in his youth. At one time he even tried etching. Edwin Clayhanger and Cyril Povey in his fiction both draw maps in their childhood; the former desires to be an architect and the latter is an excellent art student in adolescence and becomes a sort of sculptor in adulthood. In The Old Wives' Tale, more than three hundred words are devoted exclusively to a description of a coloured print.¹³ After Mynors and Anna have surveyed the Tellwright kitchen, Bennett makes the former character comment that it is like a 'picture'.¹⁴ Water-colour remained Bennett's hobby throughout his literary career. Later in life he became something of an

art critic and collector. In fact, he remained enthusiastic about the visual arts throughout his life. With his artistic sensitivity, he was strongly conscious of the importance of the careful observation of reality, as practised by a painter or sculptor. In 'Seeing Life', he makes a distinction between 'watching' and 'seeing', which, he claims, results in the acquisition of the information of 'intelligent and interesting particulars' and is an essential quality of an author.¹⁵ In a letter to H. G. Wells, in which Conrad's The Nigger of the Narcissus is discussed, Bennett stresses the paramount importance of 'seeing':

Where did the man [Conrad] pick up that style, and that *synthetic* way of gathering up a general impression and flinging it at you? He is so consciously an artist. Now Kipling isn't an artist a bit. Kipling doesn't know what art is – I mean the art of words; *il ne se preoccupe que de la chose racontée*. He is a great writer but not an artist. There are only about six artists among our prominent novelists. George Moore is one, though he writes, on the surface, damnably. But he can *see* like a poet.¹⁶

Clearly, to Bennett, a good novelist must be a good observer and a sort of painter rather than a mere story-teller, as Kipling is described here. Bennett's own literary performance provides ample evidence that he himself, owing to that artistic strain in him, belongs to the artistic type of novelist. He made painstaking efforts to 'see' life and to 'transmute' it into fiction in the manner of painting. Even though it could be assumed that every novelist is a kind of artist, a possible explanation of the fact that Bennett's novels are full of extensive depictions of topography, interiors and physiques is that combination in him of literary talent and strong artistic orientation. If the young Bennett's artistic potential could not be realized through painting or sculpture, it had to be released through some other channel. Etienne Gilson observes:

Art historians, art critics, aesthetes, all have in common two features: a great love for art and the lack of the natural gifts that enable a man to become an artist. Their writings about art are for them a sort of compensation for the works of art they

cannot produce.¹⁷

Seen in this light, Bennett found compensation for his inability to produce good work in the fine arts by becoming a novelist of the artistic type; by being an art critic and collector; and, above all, by consciously endeavouring to transfer the spirit of painting to literary description.

There is evidence that Bennett even made efforts to produce a kind of effect usually attributed to Impressionist paintings. Consider the scene of Hilda's humane act towards old Shushions in Clayhanger:

The tableau of the little, silly old man looking up, and Hilda looking down at him, with her lips parted in a heavenly invitation, and one gloved hand caressing his greenish-black shoulder and the other mechanically holding the parasol aloft – this tableau was imprinted for ever in Edwin's mind. It was a vision blended in an instant and in an instant dissolved, but for Edwin it remained one of the epochal things of his existence.¹⁸

Apart from specifying the various details, Bennett maintains that the 'vision' is a 'tableau' (twice in the quotation and a third time in the immediate following context), and that it is 'blended in an instant and in an instant dissolved' but firmly stays in Edwin's, the autobiographical Bennett's, mind as of 'epochal' significance. Bennett not only intends this moment to be a pictorial scene comparable to a painting, but insists upon the instantaneity of the vision. The assertion has a reason. A friend of Manet, acquaintance of many other Impressionist painters, and himself an enthusiastic critic of Impressionist paintings, Bennett was shifting the spirit of Impressionism into his realistic fiction.

Given Bennett's desire to achieve the effect of painting in his novels, the most practical, direct and efficient method would seem to deal with people and things separately. Admittedly, Bennett's artistic insight, scope and skill are not as powerful as Flaubert's or Zola's. Flaubert may resort to full-length

descriptions of topography and interiors, yet his portrayals of physiques can be flawlessly incorporated into the natural progression of the narration. In Madame Bovary, through the use of the point of view of Charles, who comes to the farm Les Bertautz to set the broken leg of Emma's father, the visual identity of Emma is established in a section-by-section manner. She first appears as 'a young woman in a blue merino dress with three flounces.'¹⁹ Then the focus of the narration is switched to the interior of the kitchen, the patient himself, and Charles's preoccupation with his work. It is only after a considerable space, at the stage where Emma, while sewing, keeps pricking her fingers and raising them to her lips to suck them that more physical details of her are disclosed. The whiteness of her fingernails catches Charles's attention: 'They were shiny, thin at the tips, almond-shaped and as spotlessly clean as Dieppe ivories.'²⁰ The description moves naturally from the fingernails to the hands, and thence to the eyes, which are fixed upon the work in her hands:

Her hands, however, were not pretty: not pale enough, perhaps, and a little rough at the joints; they were also too long, and without soft curves. Her eyes were her best features; they were brown, although they seemed black because of her eyelashes, and they looked straight at you with naive boldness.²¹

Subsequently, the narrative turns away to attend successively to M. Rouault, the interior of the parlour, and the conversation between Charles and Emma in the room. As the place is cold, she shivers. This shivering triggers off a further portrayal of the remaining aspects of her physique: first the lips, then the neck. The hair is depicted at unusual length:

Her black hair was divided into two sections by a fine part running down the middle of her head; these sections, drawn tightly over her skull, were so smooth that each seemed to be of one piece. They covered all but the tips of her ears and were joined at the back of her head in a large chignon. The hair over her temples was waved slightly, a refinement which the country

doctor now noticed for the first time in his life.²²

Afterwards, the narrative continues in other directions. Yet visual data about Emma's physical appearance are constantly, though unforegroundedly, released in accordance with the development of the story.

Bennett's approach is different. When Anna first appears, the visual information of her appearance is presented in a highly condensed form:

Anna Tellwright stood motionless for a second in the shadow of the doorway. She was tall, but not unusually so, and sturdily built up. Her figure, though the bust was a little flat, had the lenient curves of absolute maturity. Anna had been a woman since seventeen, and she was now on the eve of her twenty-first birthday. She wore a plain, home-made light frock checked with brown and edged with brown velvet, thin cotton gloves of cream colour, and a broad straw hat like her sister's. Her grave face, owing to the prominence of the cheekbones and the width of the jaw, had a slight angularity; the lips were thin, the brown eyes rather large, the eyebrows level, the nose fine and delicate; the ears could scarcely be seen for the dark brown hair which was brushed diagonally across the temples, leaving of the forehead only a pale triangle. It seemed a face for the cloister, austere in contour, fervent in expression, the severity of it mollified by that resigned and spiritual melancholy peculiar to women who through the error of destiny have been born into a wrong environment.²³

The description is firmly hemmed into the space of a single paragraph precisely as that of the Tellwright kitchen is enclosed in one extensive paragraph. Within this special domain, no diversion is allowed from the intense concentration on the part of the author to construct the physique of Anna. There is no further condensed depiction of Anna's appearance and very few subsequent references to it. Leonora, Meshach Myatt, and Larch's sister are treated in precisely the same way. The presentations of old Shushions at the Sunday School Centenary, and of the corpse of Scales, as the previous account shows, reveal the same inclination on Bennett's part to render undiverted portrayals of characters' physical appearances.

Bennett's method, it should be noted, is by no means exceptional. Many

nineteenth-century novelists adopt the same approach. And the question may well be asked whether after all it is desirable to accord a detailed, comprehensive descriptive passage to a character's physique. Liza in Liza of Lambeth first appears as:

A young girl of about eighteen, with dark eyes, and an enormous fringe, puffed-out and curled and frizzed, covering her whole forehead from side to side and coming down to meet her eyebrows. She was dressed in brilliant violet, with great lappets of velvet and she had on her head an enormous black hat covered with feather.²⁴

This is an incomplete picture. Only a few striking features of her appearance are picked out and described at length: her fringe, her dress and her hat. Data about the other aspects of her physique are not provided at all. Similarly, the only point where the all-important character Farfrae in The Mayor of Casterbridge (1886) is accorded concentrated descriptive attention is when he meets Lucetta. In this case, he is assigned a few abstract nouns and a figure of speech, which inform the reader more of his character than of his physical appearance: 'That hyperborean crispness, stringency, and charm, as of a well-braced musical instrument... made his unexpected presence here attractive to Lucetta.'²⁵ Another similar case is Gissing's treatment of Jane Snowdon's face, which contrasts strongly to Bennett's handling of that of Anna: 'The freely exposed neck was very thin, but, like the outline of her face, spoke less of a feeble habit of body than of the present pinch of sheer hunger.'²⁶ This sentence occurs when she first appears in The Nether World. Her face is only *mentioned*. No physiological information concerning it is provided, although subsequently it is accorded some vague attention when her mentality is given an account. In The Old Wives' Tale and Clayhanger, Bennett himself withholds from giving concentrated descriptions of the physiques of the protagonists.

The reason for Bennett's use of the method of condensed descriptive passages is to be found in his tendency towards the creation of a *linguistic portrait* in the sense that a portrait painter paints a portrait on canvas. The approach is similar to the 'liangxiang' of Beijing opera as well, where the protagonist, appearing for the first time on the stage, singing, turns his or her full face towards the audience, assumes a certain posture that aims to take a firm hold of the audience's attention, and remains in this state for half a minute or more. Bennett's rendering of Anna's physique is thorough. Every aspect is covered. To ensure the effect of a portrait, no physical action is allowed her. This tactic is in direct contrast to Hardy's treatment of Henchard and Gissing's of John Snowdon in the opening passages respectively of The Mayor of Casterbridge and The Nether World. In both cases, a great deal of the characters' physical detail is released within a shortspace. Yet, Henchard is shown to be walking, carrying a rush basket by a looped strap at his back. The particular manner in which he walks is described in unusual detail. Similarly, Snowdon is walking while his physique is being built up and his dress given a meticulous portrayal.

As a painter's portrait should transmit a given visual effect (it not only conveys the particular physical features of the person represented, but also reveals a particular psychological state that he or she is in), so Bennett's description of Anna not only establishes her visual identity in strict physiological terms but also brings out a great deal of her mentality, which is in precise accordance with her later development in the story. Adjectives and nouns like 'grave', 'cloister', 'austere', 'fervent', 'severity', 'resigned', and 'melancholy' are clearly meant to indicate a puritanical domesticity and a stoical psychology, anticipatory of a life of renunciation. More to the point is the fact that these words, together with 'prominence', 'angularity', 'thin', and 'delicate' all convey qualities. All of them belong to the kind of words that are

usually used to denote a state as opposed to an act.

A point emerges clearly at this stage of the present argument that in his full-length descriptions, Bennett not only tends to separate things and people, but also prefers to present them in a *static* state. It is significant that when introducing Anna, he makes her stand 'motionless'. The point becomes even more clear when A Mummer's Wife is summoned in support. In its introduction of the heroine Kate are mingled descriptions of her physical appearance, her asthmatic husband Ralph Ede coughing and groaning in his sick-bed, her sewing, her attending Ralph and above all, the various unpleasant physical minutiae of a depressive interior. Bennett's method is scarcely comparable to Moore's. Nor is it comparable to that of those nineteenth-century painters who portray human figures as in movement or against a background of minute physical details, as, for instance, J. -F. Millet in his *The Sower* or Gustave Courbet in his *The Painter's Studio*. Bennett inclines strongly towards a still-life approach. This is particularly the case with his treatment of interiors. A still-life is a kind of painting; a novelist's description of objects is a linguistic product. The ultimate comparability of the two different media and the desirability of this kind of comparison are open to discussion, but there should be little doubt that a still-life painter and a novelist like Bennett portraying an interior both aim at the maximum objectivity of reproduction. A comparison of part of Bennett's portrayal of Larch's new abode in London with the exact wording of the description of a still-life taken from a catalogue will throw light upon the present argument:

- a) The mantelpiece, painted mustard yellow, bore diverse squat earthenware figures and was surmounted by oblong mirror framed in rose wood.²⁷
- b) On a wooden table, a skull resting on one of a number of books, a candle in a brass candlestick, a glass beaker, and a carafe of wine.²⁸

The similarity between the two passages is obvious. Both descriptions have certain inanimate objects as their subject matter; the objects are all in a motionless physical state; their particular spatial relationships to one another are specified. The high frequency of interior descriptions in Bennett's fiction also renders support to the present point, which can be further strengthened by the fact that his full-length depictions of physiques invariably tend towards staticness, which is the defining characteristic of a still-life. Bennett's handling of old Shushions shows the same inclination. More effective evidence comes from Bennett's depiction of Scales's corpse, which, needless to say, is lifeless. It is worth pointing out that the French word for still-life is *nature morte*, which throws light upon the entire situation. Concerning still-life Etienne Gilson maintains:

However great the artist, he cannot convince us that his immobile puppets are really running, talking, and acting. Not so in a still-life, which, by definition, is a picture consisting of inanimate objects... In a still-life nothing acts, nothing gesticulates, nothing does anything else than to be... The kind of plenary satisfaction we experience while looking at a still-life is due to the perfect adequacy that obtains, in this case, between the substance of the work of art and reality it represents. Such pictures are solid and inanimate objects enjoying a continuous mode of physical existence.²⁹

The gist of Gilson's observation seems to be the 'perfect adequacy' which is inherent in still-life in its representation of reality and which arises largely out of the motionlessness of the inanimate objects represented. Seen in this light, Bennett, in his orientation towards the still-life method, is being driven by a kind of impulse, which is ascribable to his commitment to realism, towards the maximum degree of verisimilitude that the novel as a distinct medium can possibly achieve, even though he might not have been fully aware of the possible advantage of the method and of the effect it could produce. A fact relevant to the present point is that remarkable resemblance exists between

still-life and *trompe-l'oeil* as two distinct artistic genres. The latter aims at an unusually accurate representation of objects. Its accuracy is such that the picture deceives the eyes, creating an effect that makes a human being or any other living creature mistake the illusion of art for actual reality. The logic underlying Bennett's approach would thus seem to be a), for him, the external physical phenomena, visual, aural, kinesthetic, spatial and temporal, are REAL; b), as a realist of the French type, the visual aspect of things appeals strongly to him; c), in order to represent adequately the visual reality as he apprehends it with the given medium of language, he naturally chooses a method that bears a strong similarity to the visual genre of still-life. A look at some of Bennett's journal entries concerning his hobby as a water-colourist is revealing in this connection. The entry for Tuesday, 13th, September, 1910 reads: 'On Sunday I at last finished a water-colour, of a *flower bowl*, that was not absolutely putrid.'³⁰ [My italics.] That for 28th, September, 1916: 'It was very wet yesterday. I did a water-colour through the rainy window in the morning, and *part of an interior* in the afternoon.'³¹ [My italics.] Clearly, the things he was interested in are common subjects for still-life.

The novel is a form of story-telling. Story-telling, in variegated forms, with various levels of sophistication, and regardless of differences in culture and race, is an ancient human phenomenon and a basic human instinct. The evolution of this human ability through the depth of history eventually arrived at an era in which the novel, the most sophisticated and most capable form of story-telling in strict terms of language, prevailed and tended strongly to overshadow other forms of art in nineteenth-century Western Europe. Bennett observed in 1914 in The Author's Craft:

The novelist is he who, having seen life, and being so excited by it that he absolutely must transmit the vision to others, chooses narrative fiction as the liveliest vehicle for the relief of his feelings. He is like other artists – he cannot remain silent... And

you can see primitive novelists to this day transmitting to acquaintances their fragmentary and crude visions of life in the cafe or the club... By innumerable entertaining steps from them you may ascend to the major artist whose vision of life, inclusive, intricate and intense, requires for its due transmission the great traditional form of the novel as perfected by the masters of a long age which has temporarily set the novel higher than any other art form. The novel has, and always will have, the advantage of its comprehensive bigness.³²

Clearly, Bennett was aware of the immense potential of the novel, its possible superiority over other forms of art, and of the fact that it had evolved to its contemporary state from the basic human instinct of story-telling. Eighty years since the publication of The Author's Craft, the novel form, with realism as its defining characteristic, has been relegated to a humble secondary status by the rise of the more powerful medium of cinema. The new medium has appropriated and made creative use of the techniques of all the other art forms. It surpasses the novel in verisimilitude, as its essence consists in the creation of a succession of animated images that appeal directly to perception, and it possesses the means of a much more immediate representation of reality, of producing a unique sense of familiarity. Bennett, as other novelists of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, was in no position to have a full idea of what the cinema has accomplished. These modern counterparts to the ancient story-tellers were making exhaustive use of the resources that the novel as a distinct genre provided them, and were pushing it towards its uttermost limitation in its capacity of transmitting visual information by elaborating visual details with language. Seen within the prospect of a sufficient time span, Bennett, like other novelists of his type, was endeavouring to accomplish certain linguistic feats that could have been more appropriately and more efficiently achieved by media other than the novel. His innumerable full-length descriptions of interiors and physiques are essentially the artificial product of an incongruous instrument that has been assigned an unsuitable

task. The creation and transmission of visual images in physical terms with a loquacious tongue are in many senses a quixotic enterprise. Understandably, even when Bennett was still in his productive years, the novel form was already switching, unhesitatingly enough, in the direction of the expression of the internal or subjective aspect of human existence, rejecting the attitude of the realists that had long been prevalent and had been manifest even in the romanticists.

Quixotic as it might appear, Bennett's effort is laudable in the sense that it mirrors an important aspect of the realistic convention that had nearly fulfilled its historical mission by the time of his death. It is obvious enough that painting is inadequate in telling stories. Likewise, the novel is inadequate in strict terms of visualization. Yet there can be little doubt that the novel is more efficient than painting in revealing complicated social relations, representing complicated human psychology, and expressing the nuances of variegated human feelings. If positive attempts at a thorough representation of visual phenomena are incorporated into a conceptual/narrative medium, a new mode comes into being, which possesses the strengths of both narrative fiction and painting. The transference of pictorial effects to literary description made the novel the most powerful medium in the nineteenth century for an efficient transmission of the illusion of an unprecedentedly complex reality. A highly sophisticated society needed a highly sophisticated artistic mode for its proper functioning. Before the advent of the motion picture, the realistic novel acted as such a mode. In Western Europe, throughout the nineteenth century, the novel to a large extent was playing the role that is being played by the cinema at the present time. Interestingly enough, as though aware of its historical mission as a highly expressive and comprehensive medium before the advent of a more potent one, the novel was shifting its attention towards a full rendition of human consciousness in precisely the same period when the

cinema was rising towards a full realization of its potentialities and was beginning to fulfil an unprecedented democratic role in the sense that it captured, as had the novel, yet on a much larger scale, the attention of the masses of a nation.

If visualization through language constitutes a sign of sophistication for an essentially concept-dependent medium, as in the case of realist fiction, it is then not difficult to accept the relentless, even absurd, thoroughness in the building-up of interiors or physiques in Bennett's fiction. In his descriptions of physiques, this thoroughness manifests itself in his overwhelming concentration upon the face, whose expression, he believes, generally reveals 'the interplay of instincts and influences which determine the existence of a community.'³³ Likewise, in his treatment of interiors, it expresses itself in an equally overpowering focusing upon one single object, as in the case of the window of the Baineses' kitchen. Both situations represent efforts on a linguistic plane at an effect comparable to that of the cinematic close-up. The most radical instance of this unique thoroughness in all Bennett's fiction is to be found in his portrayal of the dresser in the Tellwrights' kitchen:

Its furniture included a dresser of the simple and dignified kind which is now assiduously collected by amateurs of old oak. It had four long narrow shelves holding plates and saucers; the cups were hung in a row on small brass hooks screwed into the fronts of the shelves. Below the shelves were three drawers in a line, with brass handles, and below the drawers was a large recess which held stone jars, a copper preserving-saucepan, and other receptacles. Seventy years of continuous polishing by a dynasty of priestesses of cleanliness had given to this dresser a rich ripe tone which the cleverest trade-trickster could not have imitated. In it was reflected the conscientious labour of generations. It had a soft and assuaged appearance, as though it had never been new and could never have been new. All its corners and edges had long lost the asperities of manufacture, and its smooth surfaces were marked by slight hollows similar in spirit to those worn by the naked feet of pilgrims into the marble steps of a shrine. The flat portion over the drawers was scarred with hundreds of scratches, and yet even all these seemed to be incredibly ancient and in some distant past to have partaken of the mellowness of the whole. The dark

woodwork formed an admirable background for the crockery on the shelves, and a few of the old plates, hand painted according to some vanished secret in pigments which time could only improve, had the look of relationship by birth to the dresser. There must still be thousands of exactly similar dressers in the kitchens of the people, but they are gradually being transferred to the dining rooms of curiosity-hunters. To Anna this piece of furniture, which would have made the most taciturn collector vocal with joy, was merely 'the dresser'. She had always lamented that it contained no cupboard.³⁴

An amazing amount of information, in the form of either objective description or direct authorial explanation and comment, concerning every feature of the dresser at that 'present' moment and its remarkable past, is heaped upon this one single piece of furniture. Here, Bennett borders on absurdity, which, not unjustifiably, his literary friend George Sturt criticized upon the publication of Anna. The extremism of the description can be explained by Bennett's rigorous intention to linguistically visualize the object. Even assuming that linguistic visualization is ultimately nonsensical in the sense that language as an instrument for conveying visual information relies crucially on the reader's imagination and that the information thus conveyed and apprehended is cognitively already tampered with, a dynamic drive towards a maximum degree of verisimilitude through an exceedingly thorough-going still-life construction of the static vision of a homely dresser is clearly observable on the part of Bennett.

It has been argued that fiction as a conceptual medium is essentially inadequate for the rendition of visual phenomena. A related point is that visual phenomena themselves can prove unstable, changeable, and erratic. The apprehension of them can vary a great deal from individual to individual and from time to time. Since one man's approach to reality may differ from another's to the extent that there arise positive confusions in connection with the dichotomy of objectivity and subjectivity, it would then seem nonsensical to insist on objectivity of reproduction in fiction. Bennett was not a militant

theoretical realist. He seldom discussed the issue except in very general terms. He might not have realized that the kind of 'beauty' he was so garrulous about, particularly during the first decade of his literary career, is fundamentally of a highly subjective nature; that is, it presents a ready contradiction to the doctrine to which he adhered that is based upon a crucial emphasis on the positive objectivity and apprehensibility of empirical phenomena – the doctrine of realism. To what extent and in what way external reality is representable in fiction are open to discussion, but attention should be drawn towards the ultimate subjectiveness lurking in any mode of art, realist fiction being no exception. In the case of Bennett a comparison of two passages written by two different persons about the topography of the Potteries will suffice to render support for the present argument. In a manner similar to that of Bennett's journal entry quoted at the opening of Chapter 5, the Five Towns are given another pictorial depiction in Whom God hath Joined:

West and north and south are the Five Towns... All around the horizon, and in the deepest valley at Cauldon, the yellow fires of furnaces grow brighter in the first oncoming of the dusk. The immense congeries of streets and squares, of little houses and great halls and manufactories, of church spires and proud smoking chimneys and chapel towers, mingle together into one wondrous organism that stretches and rolls unevenly away for miles in the grimy mists of its own endless panting. Railway stations, institutes, temples, colleges, grave-yards... What are they, but the natural, beautiful inevitable manifestation of the indestructible Force that is within you?³⁵

Clearly, the Potteries are viewed through the eyes of a novelist of the artistic type fully armed with the theories of realism. The description of the same region at roughly the same period in When I was a Child by William Shaw, a potter born at Tunstall, reveals a striking contrast to Bennett's perception:

Huge mounds of slag and dirt are seen now, filling the valley, burning for years with slow, smoky fires within them. Poor

Chatterly Farm stands like a blasted wraith of its once rural buxomness. The Big Wood is blotched and scarred with heaps of slag in enormous blocks. Where birds once sang in the stillness of its trees, a railway engine now snorts and blows like an o'er-laboured beast, and trucks mangle and jangle with their wheels and couplings. A railway runs through the valley, and it seems a mystery to every observer from the town how the trains find their way through the mound encumbrances which would seem to block the road. Such is the march of civilization!³⁶

This passage renders in a nostalgic tone an account of the disfiguring of an area once full of natural beauty. Since Shaw's version of the Potteries's topography is much more socio-historical than Bennett's, it could be granted the status of the average man's notion of the district in that it more faithfully represents reality as a person in the region whose natural perception had not been tampered with by superimposed convictions might have conceived. Different approaches result in totally different visions.

If subjectiveness can be so glaringly apparent even in such a directly perceptual act as the apprehension of the topography of a place, its workings in individuals' comprehension of social and moral matters should be even more obvious. After all, human relations are not such tangible and visible phenomena as the ovens and chimneys of the Potteries. In an essentially quixotic way, Bennett could create a mock reality of an interior or a physique, presumably according to some factual models. However, like other realists, he could not have had a full grasp of, let alone reproduced faithfully, the 'whole truth', about which the early French realists had been loquacious but concerning which he himself was wise enough to hold his tongue. He was well aware of the fallacious nature of the myth of the 'whole truth', and of the ultimate imaginativeness and subjectiveness of any mode of art.

CHAPTER 7

A TEMPERATE REALIST

The French realists' conviction that art must be free to deal with any subject and their literary practice of treating sexuality with considerable frankness made the question of how sexual matters should be handled in English fiction a central one for novelists. It could even be claimed that the general British public was to a large extent only awakened to the existence of a literature of immense dynamism across the Channel by the controversy over this issue that broke out in the late 1880s: it involved a challenge to conventional morality that was of major importance to the many novelists at the turn of the century who considered themselves as artists rather than mere story-tellers. Bennett was such a novelist. The public he was faced with was one that he believed to be 'incapable of differentiating subject and treatment' and one that had long demonstrated a tenacious national reticence with regard to this particular taboo.¹ In these circumstances, what kind of fiction could Bennett write for the consumption of British readers without cruelly ravaging their notion of morality? George Moore had before him dealt with the immorality and vice arising out of alcoholism in A Mummer's Wife in much the same manner as Zola. Yet he showed less than half the candour that Zola had shown in such novels as Thérèse Raquin, La Terre and L'Assommoir. Bennett himself, as has been shown before, was capable of producing lengthy descriptions of repulsive scenes that might have been objectionable to some readers, but this had nothing to do with sex. Since it was the French realists' daring attitude to life that initially attracted him to them and led him to his life-long 'desire for France', he was sure in one way or another to attempt to deal with sexuality in his own fiction, though in a manner that was adapted for his British readers.

In 1905, he published Sacred and Profane Love. The title proved offensive to the guardians of morality, as can be seen from the indignation and annoyance of an unsigned review in the Pall Mall Gazette:

The title of Mr Bennett's novel is a triumph in the art of misdescription. It suggests associations which have no part at all in the crude and mundane story he has condescended to put on paper. ... It is, in brief, a 'shocker'.²

The reviewer announced that he had hitherto regarded Bennett as a serious novelist, as though the sexuality in Sacred and Profane Love marked a total departure for Bennett. Yet already in A Man from the North, there had been a scene in which the would-be writer Richard Larch, disturbed by his lover permanently leaving him for America, gives himself up to a prostitute:

As he was passing the entry to a court, a woman came out, and both had to draw back to avoid a collision. 'Cheril!' she murmured. She was no longer young...He did not answer, and she spoke to him again. His spine assumed consistency of butter; a shuddering thrill ran through him. She put her arm gently into his, and pressed it. He had no resistance...³

Clearly, Larch is roused, but there is no lingering on Bennett's part on his arousal. Only one sentence is devoted to the purpose. Larch lets himself be led 'astray' in the circumstance of his distress, which is a passable excuse. The classical device '...' timely shuts off the rest of the scene. It is a sort of daring, but a muffled daring.

After A Man from the North, this relationship between man and woman was generally handled in conformity with the Victorian code. When Bennett was planning Sacred and Profane Love in November 1904, he undoubtedly intended it to be a challenge to public morality. He noted in his journal:

I outlined the plot to Davray. I don't think he was very struck by it, and he asked whether the British public would stand it. However, from a crude outline he had nothing upon which to judge.⁴

The novel that eventually emerged tells the story of a sexual relationship between a Five Towns girl Carlotta Peel and an internationally famous pianist Diaz. Carlotta leaves the Five Towns to make her career as writer in London. She becomes sexually involved with her publisher Ispenlove, who is driven to suicide by marital and love complication. Carlotta then meets Diaz again, who is now sick, and decides to live with him. They co-operate in composing a brilliant opera but she dies of appendicitis at the height of her career. Although the details of the novel still remained to be worked out, even its bare outline made Bennett's friend think that it would turn out too much for the sensitivity of the public. No doubt Bennett himself knew this: the journal entry suggests that he intended to make the novel a kind of 'shocker'.

In the Carlotta-Diaz love scene, there is an extended description of Carlotta's sexual arousal:

The conventions of society seemed then like sand, foolishly raised to imprison the restless tide of ocean. Nature, after all, is eternal and unchangeable, and everywhere the same. The great and solemn fact for me was that we were together, and he held me; he clasped me, and, despite my innocence, I knew at once those hands were as expert to caress as to make music. I was proud and glad that he was a master. And at that point I ceased to have volition...⁵

As in the case of Larch's 'shuddering thrill', this scene of passion is closed at a timely moment with the omission dots. Later on when Ispenlove kisses Carlotta, Bennett gives another extended description of her sexual arousal:

I shivered with pleasure when I saw his arms move, and then he clutched and dragged me to him, and I hid my glowing face on his shoulder, in the dear folds of his over coat, and I felt his lips on my neck. And then, since neither of us was a coward, we lifted our heads, and our mouths met honestly and fairly, and, so united, we shut our eyes for an eternal moment, and the world was lost.⁶

As many critics have noticed, Bennett is incapable of dealing with sexual

excitement adequately. In the case of Larch, he stops at the 'shuddering thrill' and goes on no further. Carlotta's passion is treated at some length but the descriptions are characterized by a certain languor, with the use of such general terms as 'nature', 'eternal moment', and 'the world was lost', and by having the heroine pondering issues of convention and morality rather than portraying her as in a state of physical abandonment. Contrasted with Zola, Bennett's descriptions appear pallid and spiritless. Concerning this aspect of Bennett's work John Lucas observes:

At this stage of his career Bennett simply couldn't imagine a woman sexually alive. But why, then, should he try to? The answer to that must be that as an Edwardian, alert to the 'new woman', and as an ardent Francophile, it was inevitable that he should attempt to write a novel of sexual passion, seen from the woman's point of view. But since he was also Arnold Bennett, it was equally inevitable that the novel should fail.⁷

Lucas's reproach is even more severe when the following remarks are taken into consideration: 'The really staggering fact is that Bennett appears to have been perfectly serious about Sacred and Profane Love'.⁸ There is certainly truth in Lucas's belief that Bennett is not successful when attempting to portray sexual excitement. However, it was not merely to cater for the 'new woman' or because he was a Francophile that he made this attempt to write about sexual passion. There is ample evidence in Sacred and Profane Love that Bennett was tentatively, yet consciously, endeavouring to be 'profane' towards 'sacred' public morality. In fact, irony pervades the whole novel.

At the beginning of the Carlotta-Diaz love scene, when Diaz takes Carlotta's hand and asks her name, she is 'surprised', and:

Memories of the Bible, for some inexplicable reason,
flashed through my mind .

'Magdalen', I replied, and my voice was so deceptively
quiet and sincere that he believed it.

I could see that he was taken aback.

'It is a holy name and a good name', he said, after a

pause.⁹

By choosing her false name from the Bible, Carlotta, a puppet of Bennett that embodies sensuality or 'nature' as opposed to the morality imposed by religion and convention, has committed an act, though mild, of blasphemy. Diaz is in turn surprised, and by making him comment 'it is a holy name' only 'after a pause' Bennett accomplishes a mocking duet at the expense of Christian faith.

The amorous scene continues: 'I saw in love the sole and and sacred purpose of the universe, and my heart whispered, with a new import: "Where love is, there is God also."' ¹⁰ Here, the profane turns defiantly into the sacred. The general impression is that Carlotta, fully conscious of her profanity, is positively offering herself to Diaz rather than Diaz playing the main part in the affair, despite his sexual experience. Subsequently, the first-person narrator Carlotta/Bennett persists in this mild and tentative blasphemy: 'The fever of music increased, and with it my fever.' ¹¹ In the Ispenlove-Carlotta love scene, after they have closed their eyes for 'an eternal moment' and the 'the world was lost', Carlotta says: 'Such was the avowal.' ¹² It sounds a bit funny. Bennett is being naughty. The provocation was not too extreme to be unacceptable to his readers. This scene goes on:

I gave up my soul to him in that long kiss, all that was most secret and precious in me, ascended and poured itself out through my tense lips, and was received by him. I kissed him with my self, with the entire passionate energy of my being...the sweet cruelty of his desperate clutch on my shoulders, the glimpses of his skin through my eyelashes when I raised ever so little my eyelids! Pain and joy of life, you were mingled then! ¹³

Presumably, Bennett is seriously presenting Carlotta as being consumed in her passion, yet the voice of Bennett/Carlotta opportunely and significantly intrudes itself into the scene:

I remembered that I was a woman, and disengaged myself and

withdrew from him. I hated to do it; but I did it.¹⁴

It is profanity confessed in a fairly profane way. Yet it is also devoid of any violent extremity that might have rendered it the kind of pornography which would drive a publisher away. The male psychology of Bennett, who was presumably parodying Ouida (his beloved symbol of defiance of conventional morality), provocatively expresses itself through that of a female fictional figure, and cruelly mocks the feminine prudery and niceness that had been imposed by convention and had been practised in earnest by generations of Victorian ladies and were still being practised when Bennett was writing Sacred and Profane Love. Clearly, when conceiving the novel, Bennett's prime concern was not to reproduce sexual passion, but to present a challenge, which is cautious, but effective in its own way, to moral conventions. What he really cared about was the reaction of the public, as his journal suggests. It was about this that he was 'perfectly serious'. Whether he could present a scene of sexual passion successfully or whether he was totally serious when making such an effort are therefore unimportant to Sacred and Profane Love as a novel in its own right. The choice of the subject itself, the deliberate use of a provocative title, and the fact that the story is told throughout in the first person by a female narrator (which is in itself unusual as all Bennett's major novels are in the third person) clearly indicates Bennett's real intention. Equally significant are the titles of the books written by Carlotta - The Jest and Burning Sappho. The heroine even attempts to seduce the eighty-six-year-old Lord Francis; and Bennett draws emphatic attention to the unconventional nature of her behaviour by making Carlotta say that Lord Francis is exactly sixty years older than she.

In his reproach of Bennett, Lucas also deprecates other Edwardian novelists: 'To be fair, I don't know of any Edwardian novelist who can be said

to succeed in creating the passionate woman so many of them write about.¹⁵ He is correct, probably. However, he does not take into sufficient consideration the persistent censorship throughout the Victorian and Edwardian periods that acted as a strong deterrent to a fully successful rendition of sexual passion. Fiction that could and did treat sexuality seriously and frankly had not really existed in Britain during the entire Victorian period. What was seen as obscenity by the standards of both the British and the French could without much trouble enter the serious novels by Flaubert, Zola and Maupassant in nineteenth-century France. In Victorian Britain it could only exist underground as a sub-literary genre. Facing the still all-powerful presence of the guarding forces of public morality during the first two decades of the twentieth century, the only reasonable thing that Bennett could do was to adopt a sardonic stance and to play games with the public, a role he was fully conscious of. In Sacred and Profane Love he played the game quite skilfully.

Given the moral ambience of the time and the 'inevitability' of Bennett making attempts to bring the issue of sexuality into his own literary practice, the only conceivable way for him to achieve his aim was to try tentatively, and tantalisingly. The psychology underlying this attitude seems to be that the more forbidden, the more alluring. The autobiographical Bennett Richard Larch, making his way as a provincial in London shows such a turn of mind:

It is not too much to say that the Ottaman held a stronger fascination for Richard than any other place in London. The British Museum, Fleet Street, and the Lyceum were magic names, but more magical than either was the name of the Ottaman. The Ottaman, on rare occasions when it happened to be mentioned in Bursley, was a synonym for all the glittering vices of the metropolis. It stank in the nostrils of the London delegates who came down to speak at the annual meetings of the local Society for the Suppression of Vice. But how often had Richard, somnolent in chapel, mitigated the rigours of a long sermon by dreaming of an Ottaman ballet – one of those voluptuous spectacles, all legs and white arms, which from time to time were described so ornately in the London daily papers.¹⁶

It is not Bennett's intention that Larch should be an exceptionally decent man. As Edwin Clayhanger would later be made to curse savagely a Wesleyan minister, so Larch is shown here to be secretly blaspheming religion by dreaming in chapel about the legs and white arms of the Ottoman ballet dancers. However, apart from him later being led away by a prostitute, this seems to be all that he can be allowed to do. Bennett hits and runs. He uses the tactic not only in A Man from the North, but also in Sacred and Profane Love and The Pretty Lady.

When conceiving The Pretty Lady in March, 1917, Bennett noted in his journal: 'I had an idea for a short novel about an episode in the life of a French cocotte. I thought I could tell practically everything without shocking the B. P.' ¹⁷ To write about a prostitute itself was a defiant act. Yet, as in the cases of A Man from the North and Sacred and Profane Love, Bennett could not 'tell everything'. When G. J. Hoape, the protagonist and chief reflector of The Pretty Lady, makes his first visit to the prostitute Christine's flat, Bennett 'behaves' himself remarkably well in comparison with similar scenes in A Man from the North and Sacred and Profane Love. Only a fragment of a prelude to a possible full love-making scene is given, and it is presented in a remarkably restrained manner:

She went near him and clasped hands round his neck, and whispered:

"Your waltz was adorable. You are an artist."

And with her shoulders she seemed to sketch the movements of dancing.¹⁸

The chapter entitled 'The Flat' thus concludes. In the first passage of the next chapter Hoape is seen to be putting on his overcoat to leave. This is a device of omission similar to that in A Man from the North and Sacred and Profane Love. Apparently, Bennett felt that it was unwise to dwell on an episode of sexual passion involving a prostitute in order to challenge the public. In his

treatment of the relationship between Hoape and Concepcion, who is an actress, Bennett cautiously, yet effectively outrages the earnest mind of the guardians of morality. Concepcion's husband has been killed in the war and she has received an official telegraph informing her of his death. Unaware of this, Hoape has come to her place with the intention of informing and consoling her, and Concepcion manages for him to understand that she already knows:

"Why didn't you tell me at once?" he murmured, frightfully shocked. He was actually reproaching her!
 She stood up again. She lived; her breast rose and fell. Her gown had the same voluptuousness. Her temperament was still emanating the same aura. She was the same new Concepcion, strange yet profoundly known to him.¹⁹

To be fair, the tone here is quite reposed, unlike that of a younger Bennett of Sacred and Profane Love bent on mocking the public mentality impetuously. Bennett is being shrewd. The juxtaposition of the revelation of the news of death with the description of the amorous thoughts of the protagonist constitutes a crafty defiance of the public mind. A similar case is to be found in 'The Return' chapter:

Concepcion half sat down by the table, and then, altering her mind, dropped on to a vast chaise-longue, as wide as a bed, and covered with as many cushions as would have stocked a cushion shop... The hem of her rich gown just touched the floor. G. J. could see that she was wearing the transparent deep-purple stockings that Queen wore with the transparent lavender gown. Her right shoulders rose high from the mass of her body, and her head was sunk between two cushions: And in the bewildering voluptuous brightness and luxury of the room G. J. had the sensation of being a poor, baffled ghost groping in the night of existence. Concepcion's left hand slipped over the edge of the day-bed and hung limp and pale, the curved fingers touching the carpet.²⁰

The chapter ends here. This is a slyly rendered amorous scene. Again, Bennett is playing a game with the public, with restraint yet effectiveness as well.

There is no such banality as 'I kissed him with myself'; instead, as in the preceding quotation, Bennett dwells on the seductiveness of Concepcion's dress. The amorous intimacy of the whole scene is successfully conveyed by making her lie on the chaise-longue, by indicating the transparency of her stockings and by the close-up depiction of her voluptuous hand and fingers. No violent passion is directly presented. The rest of the love-making is again left to the imagination of the reader. In the next chapter Concepcion is shown to be sitting on the chaise-longue and serving tea. Here Bennett successfully maintains an acrobatic balance between his treatment of sexuality and the delicate receptiveness of the reading public. He was trying to be true to life, to be realistic. He managed to be sufficiently 'daring', yet he was always wary and crafty before the temperament of a public which could easily be roused to indignant hostility.

If Bennett could play fairly successful games with a conventional public in such semi-serious novels as Sacred and Profane Love and The Pretty Lady, he could scarcely afford to do so in those that he meant to be taken as highly artistic. These were intended to be an adequate demonstration of the depth of his creative talent, and in them he therefore invested much painstaking labour in order to make maximum use of that talent. The man-woman relationship in Anna and Clayhanger is treated in a quite Victorian manner. The handling of the Anna-Willie-Mynors relationship is all decency. If the important figures in Clayhanger can be said to be characterized by a fundamental inertia in general, this inertia is even more conspicuously apparent in them sexually. In The Old Wives' Tale, Constance is sexually passive. The Sophia-Scales relationship involves a scandalous elopement, but it is to a large extent out of Sophia's curious and adventurous disposition. After all, she is meant to emerge a puritanical woman that meritoriously embodies the puritanical 'Baines blood'. The love-making of Julien and Jeane on the night of their wedding in Une Vie

is rendered with an unequivocal intention on the part of Maupassant to reproduce the scene faithfully:

When she felt a cold hairy leg thrust down against hers, she gave a sudden start as if to throw herself out of bed,... He...printed passionate kisses on her neck, the lace frill of her nightcap and embroidered collar of her nightdress... He clasped her tightly to him as if consumed by a devouring thirst for her, covering her face and neck with a shower of quick, hard, wild kisses, dazing her with caresses. She had unclasped her hands and lay making no response to his advances, not knowing what she was doing or what he was doing, incapable of thought. Suddenly she felt a sharp pain and began to groan, writhing in his arms, while he roughly consummated the marriage.²¹

The corresponding love-making of Sophia and Scales after they have eloped to London is limited only to kissing and caressing, though Sophia's active co-operation is clearly conveyed:

Approaching her with factitious ease, he kissed her through her veil, which she then lifted with an impulsive movement, and he kissed her again, more ardently, perceiving that her ardour was exceeding his... He could smell the stuff of her veil, the sarsenet of her bodice, and, as it were wrapped in these odours as her body was wrapped in its clothes, the faint fleshly perfume of her body itself.²²

This is the only point in The Old Wives' Tale where Bennett even attempts to render eroticism. Subsequently, the scene turns into a quarrel about whether they should be married immediately. Moreover, Bennett made no effort to include some sort of an equivalent in the novel to the liaison in Une Vie, to which Maupassant devotes considerable length, between Julien and the servant Rosalie. And it could not possibly be imagined that Bennett would have produced a scene comparable to the following extract from Thérèse Raquin describing the adulterous love-making of Thérèse and Laurent:

Lissom and strong, Thérèse held him close, throwing back her head, and flashes of fire and passionate laughter passed across her face. This face was transfigured by love, its expression was wild and yet caressing, her lips were moist, her eyes shining;

she was radiant. Writhing and sinuous, she was beautiful with a strong beauty born of passionate abandonment. It was as though her face had been lit up from within and fire leaped from her flesh. Her boiling blood and taut nerves radiated warmth, something keen and penetrating... From the very first kiss she showed herself adept in the arts of love. Her unsated body threw itself frantically into pleasure; she was emerging from a dream, she was being born into passion... She paraded this body, offering herself with supreme shamelessness. And long spasms ran through her from head to foot.²³

Whether Bennett was capable of rendering such a description as Zola's is not of much importance to the present argument. The point is that it would have proved too much for the British public, and Bennett's temperament would not allow him to go entirely against public taste. La Terre portrays the stark brutality of behaviour of the dehumanized peasants, the obscenity of their speech, and an incestuous relationship between the young Palmyre and Hilarion Fouan. L'Assommoir truthfully transcribes the sexual promiscuity between Gervaise, Coupeau and Lantier; relentlessly pursues the alcoholic characters' degradation down to utter animality, and exhaustively depicts the violent insanity of Coupeau and later of Gervaise. Germinal contains scenes of the sadistic cruelty of the miners' enraged wives towards the body of the grocer Maigrat, who is violently emasculated by a ferocious Ma Brule; of the smashing of Chaval's head with a huge flake of shale by Etienne, who is said to be driven by an uncontrollable hereditary impulse to kill, the skull splitting open, the brains spattering and the blood flooding the spot. These were all regarded as excesses of the naturalists and were totally unacceptable to the British public. Hence the trial and imprisonment of Vizetelly. Zola was undoubtedly one of Bennett's idols, yet it is wrong to demand of Bennett the literary achievement of someone who had been brought up and made his way in a quite different cultural atmosphere. More to the point is the fact that Bennett is overwhelmingly concerned with a lower-middle-class world. Understandably, the French novelists Bennett set out to emulate seriously

were the less radical Maupassant, and the almost classical Balzac who in many ways would seem to belong to a different literary era from that of Flaubert, the Goncourts and the naturalists. In so doing, Bennett was being perpetually attentive to the reaction of his reading public, which, as his journal, letters and newspaper articles show, he always treated critically and contemptuously.

The Pretty Lady was written, according to George Lafourcade, as a result of Bennett's astute discernment in war time 'that the old equilibrium had been destroyed, that a new and more acceptable compromise between decencies and realities could be offered to the readers.'²⁴ Published in 1918, the novel was still full of evasions and omissions. Bennett could still only tentatively flick the decencies of morality, as has been shown previously. Even so: 'Various attempts have been made to suppress it. Smiths, after doing extremely well out of it, have decided to ban it. Boots of course would not touch it. I doubt whether the attempts to suppress it are over yet.'²⁵ His journal entry for 30 October, 1918 reads: 'Bonar Law came in and was very courteous and cautious to me. He said his sister had been a great and constant admirer of mine, but since "The Pretty Lady" she had done with me.'²⁶ Clearly, The Pretty Lady met with more hostility than Sacred and Profane Love, which is of a much more joking nature. Despite his initial intention not to 'shock' the public, he did eventually do just that.

The Vizetelly case indicates to what extent the indignation of the reading public could reach, but it was only a sensational manifestation of a general moral ethos that had prevailed throughout the Victorian era and persisted right into the Edwardian period. Battles had been fought against anyone who threatened to pollute public morality. There had not only been individual actions but also a strong tendency to organize, from the early nineteenth-century Society for the Suppression of Vice to the late Victorian National Vigilance Association. This phenomenon seems to have attained a

new momentum during the Edwardian period. Thus, through the years before the war there was such an unusual proliferation in London alone of organizations devoted to the guardianship of other people's morals that it eventually led in 1910 to a Conference of Representatives of London Societies Interested in Public Morality. These organized groups, though voluntary and unofficial, were nevertheless extremely powerful.²⁷ Although by 1918 the fanaticism that had brought Wilde and Vizetelly to court had toned down considerably, the general moral code of the Edwardian public remained almost unchanged; therefore in writing about a 'pretty lady' Bennett aroused much antagonism.

Of the temperament of this public Bennett was well aware and was always ready to reconcile himself to it. He had written in 1914:

No first-class English novelist or dramatist would dream of allowing to his pen the freedom in treating sexual phenomena which Continental writers enjoy as a matter of course. The British public is admittedly wrong on this important point – hypocritical, illogical and absurd. But why would you? You cannot defy it; you literally cannot. If you tried, you would not even get as far as print, to say nothing of library counters. You can only get round it by ingenuity and guile.²⁸

Sacred and profane Love, the Pretty Lady, and A Man from the North to a lesser extent, are all examples of getting round the sensitivity of the British readers by 'ingenuity and guile'. In his journal entry for 19 September, 1919 Bennett wrote with satisfaction about Sacred and Profane Love adapted to the stage: ' "Sacred and Profane Love" was produced at the Playhouse, Liverpool,... The audience laughed when Iris Hoey called out "I cannot bear it" as the hero was playing the piano.... at the close the emphatic success was undeniable.'²⁹

Granted that popularity is something that no novelist can afford totally to ignore and that the British national character is essentially temperate, it is then understandable that Bennett should take such care to avoid the excesses

of the French realists and naturalists and of certain English realists. He was by no means an aesthetic extremist, fascinated by the 'genuine' value of art alone, and totally contemptuous of the popular temperament. As many critics have noticed, he managed to achieve a remarkable balance between his professed aesthetic commitment and the popular taste for decency, charity, and entertainment. The time was favourable for such practice. The publishing methods had changed a great deal. The seed sown by the Education Act of 1870 had grown into a mature tree for the Edwardian writers to gather the fruit. There was now a fairly sufficient market that demonstrated an unprecedented insatiability for literature – a mass audience that could read had emerged. Bennett, and Wells, could now confidently offer optimistic alternatives to Gissing's pessimistic dichotomy between popular and elitist art by combining in their works high artistic ideal with a positive recognition of, and a conscious attempt to satisfy, the popular taste. Bennett wrote in 1914 in The Author's Craft:

The truth is that an artist who demands appreciation from the public on his own terms, and on none but his own terms, is either a god or a conceited or impractical fool... There are two sides to every bargain, including the artistic. The most fertile and the most powerful artist are the readiest to recognize this... The sagacious artist, while respecting himself, will respect the idiosyncrasies of his public. To do both simultaneously is quite possible.³⁰

The reputation that The Old Wives' Tale and Clayhanger brought him can thus be regarded as the offspring of his compromising attitude. Concerning this aspect of Bennett's career Lafourcade writes effusively: 'by conquering and preserving a large circulation without giving up his honest realism, his honest style, his honest workmanship Bennett achieved a *tour de force*: he was that rare phenomenon, a cross between the Priest and the Purveyor.'³¹

More relevant to the present argument is that in this compromise lies one

of the explanations for Bennett's abstention from aesthetic extremism, and hence the general restraint of his realism. Lafourcade expresses doubt as to whether Bennett's mercantile outlook, his readiness to sacrifice what the public might not like or approve of were not often in accordance with his inner literary conscience,' but he is certain that Bennett's compromising disposition led to his moderate realism: 'that exquisite balance which saved him from the worst excesses of the French and English realists.'³² In A Mummer's Wife George Moore uncompromisingly traces the life of Kate Ede from her modest lower-middle-class comfort, through her deterioration, down to her eventual extinction. Total pessimism and a certain degree of cynicism, which are the results of a strict imitation of the French realists and naturalists, did not bring much fame in 1885 to Moore, who was then decidedly upholding the ideal of art-for-art's-sake. Nine years later, he became famous with the publication of Esther Waters, which was a best-seller. In this story, the working-class girl Esther has an illegitimate baby. She experiences great sufferings in bringing it up in a hypocritical and unjust society. Yet, in the end Moore makes much compensation for her sufferings by allowing her to experience pride in her grown-up son. This picture of life is much less dark than that of A Mummer's Wife. It catered for the taste of a public that disliked excesses of any kind and did not appreciate cynicism.

An admirer of Moore, Bennett certainly assessed the entire situation in which Moore found the public irresponsible to his attempt at a cross-Channel transplantation of naturalistic fiction, and therefore made conscious efforts to reconcile the artistic values that he had cherished earlier with a largely indifferent audience. Hence Richard Larch of his first novel shows neither the virtues of the Victorian protagonists nor the villainy of his French prototype Georges Duroy. He possesses no striking qualities whatsoever except his desire to be a writer. Other important characters in A Man from the North are

similar to Larch, as has been argued previously. Anna was made to cater for the British taste by including the theme of 'Christ-like compassion', which is absent in its French prototype. Likewise, The Old Wives' Tale is devoid of the sexual complications of Une Vie and of its direct portrayal of love-making. The concentrated study of the nymphomaniac servant in Germinie Lacerteux, who is shown to be ruthlessly exploited by the men she is after, tones down in The Old Wives' Tale into a pallid Maggie, who is only mentioned at the outset of the story to have been engaged eleven times in seventeen years, and to have had 'engagements and tragic partings' as her 'pastime'.³³ The major character Elsie of Riceyman Steps is a servant. She is not only not a nymphomaniac, but capable of conducting a decent love affair with a decent man, in quite the same manner as that of a Victorian fictional servant.

Bennett's compromising attitude to his reading public can be more specifically illustrated by the character Leonora. It could be assumed that she is a faint derivation of Emma Bovary. Whereas Emma cannot put up with a dull Charles, Leonora endures a vulgar and dishonest John Stanway for some twenty years. Emma makes positive efforts to alleviate the monotony of her married life by pondering nostalgically her past life as a young girl in a cloister, reading meretricious magazines, dreaming about fashion and the life-style of high society, and, above all, by taking lovers and forming adulterous relationships with them. Leonora can dream, but it seems that she dreams for the sake of dreaming:

She dreamed sadly...of an existence more distinguished than her own; an existence brilliant and tender, where dalliance and high endeavour, virtue and the flavour of sin, were incredibly united.³⁴

Apparently, when Leonora is deep in thought, Emma Bovary lingered in Bennett's mind and there is no indication at this stage of the novel that she is positively bored and disgusted by her husband. Stanway's financial chicanery

is disclosed to her only after half of the story has been told. Leonora's love for Arthur Twemlow is severely hampered by the necessity of remaining respectable. Significantly, the plot involves Stanway's attempt to murder his uncle Meshach Myatt, whose death would make himself the inheritor of the Myatt property rather than his rival Fred Ryley. Thus, Leonora's contempt for him and her love for Twemlow are given a solid moral justification. Justifiable as their love may be, Leonora's moral concerns are presented throughout the novel as a strong deterrent to its full fulfilment. Twemlow's passion for her is desperate. Instead of returning to his business in America, he manages to get back to the Five Towns in order to be together with Leonora: the steamer bound for New York on which he has embarked has actually passed Sandy Hook. Yet, in the love scene that occurs in the Stanways' garden, Leonora is shown to be only mentally experiencing a passionate love in return for that of Twemlow:

Across the fence they clasped hands. And in spite of her great wish not to do so she clutched his hand tightly in her long fingers, held it for a moment. And as she felt the returning pressure of his large, powerful, protective grasp, she covered – but in imagination only – she covered his face, which she could shadowily see, with brave and abandoned kisses.³⁵

Significantly, there is a fence to keep them apart from one another. The parenthesis gives an emphatic warning that what is told next is only an illusion. Leonora is allowed only to imagine her passion because she is deeply concerned with the issue of achieving that 'impossible feat of reconciling the duty of fulfilling love with all the other duties.'³⁶ When Twemlow proposes that they should elope to New York, her thoughts are as follows:

New York spread out invitingly before her in a vision full of piquant contrasts with the death-in-life of the Five Towns! But her beloved girls... She could not leave them; she could not forfeit the right to look them in the eyes without embarrassment... And then the next moment – ... The rapture! ...

The intense living! ... No! Common sense, the acquirement of forty years, supervened, and informed her wild heart, with all the cold arrogance of sagacity, that these imaginings were vain.³⁷

Then she seems to be saved from her mental and emotional torture by Bennett's arrangement that Stanway, unable to endure financial pressure and eventual bankruptcy, commits suicide. The main obstacle to a proper relationship between Leonora and Twemlow having been removed, they do not have to elope. However, neither are they allowed to marry immediately after Stanway's death. Twemlow suspends his courtship of Leonora for fifteen months, apparently as a direct result of Stanway's death. The courtship is resumed at the end of the period and it seems that Leonora will now accept his proposal. But she refuses him and to this Bennett devotes the whole 'Refusal' chapter – she still has her maternal responsibilities to perform. It is only after Twemlow has sincerely promised to 'keep an eye' on her daughters that she 'breathed a long, deep sigh,... permitted herself to move *infinitesimally*, but perceptibly, closer to him in the hansom; and her spirit performed the supreme feminine act of acquiescence and surrender.'³⁸ [My italics.] Clearly, Leonora has all the niceness of a typical Victorian woman but for her guilty passion, and even this in the end turns out to be perfect innocence. Her niceness also consists in her heroic effort, making use of her feminine charm, to persuade Myatt to help Stanway financially, despite her full knowledge of his financial cheating and attempt to murder Myatt. After all, Stanway is her husband. The idea of adultery never occurs to her. She loves Twemlow, and passionately, but has to maintain her decency.

A similar case is Sophia, who does elope with Scales to Paris, and returns to the Five Towns years later as a respectable elderly lady. She should have grown from a young girl into 'an old woman harnessed to a cart containing merchandise,' on either side of which is 'harnessed a dog about as big as a

pointer,' as Bennett 'felt a tremendous naughty temptation to make the daughter of the most respectable Bursley draper sink in the world and end her days as the companion of dogs in front of a cart.'³⁹ Had Bennett yielded to the temptation as he described here, Sophia would have born an strong resemblance to Gervaise of L'Assommoir and Kate Ede of A Mummer's Wife, and the public reaction to The Old Wives' Tale would have been:

What an outcry in the literary columns of the British press! What foamings at the mouth of outraged critics! And how it would somehow serve them right and do them good!⁴⁰

However, as before, Bennett made concessions to his readers. The Old Wives' Tale became what it is. During Sophia's stay in London, Scales might well have jilted rather than marry her, as, unrealized by her, he has had much sexual experience. He is virtually bullied into obeying her will by the revelation of her financial independence: 'a mysterious and prudent instinct' has moved her to steal a banknote for one hundred pounds from her aunt.⁴¹ Moreover, there is no insistence on Bennett's part that a strictly sexual passion is a crucial factor in her making the decision to elope: 'She had always known that it was only an imitation of an elopement, and must end in some awful disappointment; she had never truly wanted to run away; but something within her had pricked her forward in spite of her protests.'⁴² Her rebellious and adventurous disposition seems to have played the main part. The insincerity of Scales fully revealed to her, the puritanical Five Towns mentality expresses itself in the rebel: 'The strict notions of the elderly relatives were right after all. It was she who had been wrong. And it was she who would have to pay.'⁴³ The rascality of Scales further disclosed in Paris, he deserts Sophia, but she is full of Five Towns prudence and sagacity and is not to be defeated in life. Bennett keeps her balance long on the verge of the deep abyss of the low circumstances that surround her without ever allowing her to fall into it. Sophia successfully

resists her prostitute friends' invitation to join them in their profession. With her native commonsense and astuteness, she not only survives, but makes a modest fortune. Her pride, or stubbornness, which was bred in the Five Towns and is now fully revealing itself, is such that she refuses to be Chirac's mistress after he has displayed much chivalry and rendered much practical help to her during her illness. To be sure, Sophia is not sexless, despite her deep-rooted puritanical mentality, but, 'the foundation of her character was a haughty moral independence' and 'Chirac's inability to draw from his own pride strength to sustain himself against the blow of her refusal gradually killed in her the sexual desire which he had aroused, and which during a few days flickered up under the stimulus of fancy and of regret.'⁴⁴ Her Five-Towns-bred moral pride reveals itself further in the incident in which Chirac nearly causes a fire in her pension. Without putting the saucepan on the cooking-lamp and lowering the flame, Chirac has fallen asleep. Having discerned the smell, Sophia hastens to his room and thus prevents a disaster. When awakened and dazzled by the woman he is after, Chirac asks her to stay longer in a tone of 'supplication', even the flicker of her affection for him is shown to be at last extinguished:

The sight of him touched her and filled her with a womanly sympathy. But that sympathy was only the envelope of her disdain for him. She could not admire weakness... He had failed in human dignity... It seemed to her as if she had not previously been quite certain whether she could not love him, but that now she was quite certain... She would not make allowances.⁴⁵

With her engrained Five Towns sense of dignity, Sophia cannot possibly put up with what is seen by her to be the 'feminine slavery to sentiment' in Chirac.⁴⁶ The Sophia-Chirac relationship is odd. The oddity is very much a product of Sophia's 'unreasoning instinct', or of her moral superiority over a host of low figures with whom she associates herself for years.⁴⁷ The oddity arises also

out of Bennett's reiteration that Sophia, with her Five Towns upbringing, is far from being of a sensual nature. Her abundant 'fancy' or curiosity is far too overwhelming for her sexual aspect to fully express itself. It could be argued that Sophia's moral pride is an offspring of sexual perversity, as James Hepburn suggests in his The Art of Arnold Bennett (1963), yet this perversity by no means contradicts Bennett's intention to portray Sophia as a strong-willed middle-class woman who is not to be defeated in life. Bennett successfully 'fought and slew the temptation' to make Sophia degenerate, but he did not have to make her possess an illogical pride and too much asexual 'fancy' in her response to Chirac. Had he followed the logic of the situation, Sophia would not necessarily have emerged as a weak-willed personage like Gervaise or Kate Ede who would have been unwelcomed by the British public. In order not to make Sophia sink in the world, Bennett sacrificed his principle of being true to life. The puritanical quality in Sophia proves unchangeable. After more than thirty years of separation, Constance meets Sophia at Knype Station and the impression of her returning sister is:

'She hasn't changed a bit,' Constance thought with joy. 'Nothing could change Sophia.' And at the back of that notion was a more general notion: 'Nothing could change a Baines.'⁴⁸

Thus, the original intention of a case study of a woman's deterioration crystallized into an argument about the power of a puritanical personality. Some critics have argued that in presenting the Five Towns mentality as stubborn, prudent, disciplined, and astute, Bennett actually grasped and defined the psychology of the English nation as a whole. At a subconscious and collective level, the English disliked characters like Gervaise and Kate, and they welcomed those of Sophia's type, as Bennett realized after a shrewd estimation of the two alternatives. The success of The Old Wives' Tale provides a perfect instance of what a serious artist with a practical turn of

mind could accomplish. Had Bennett yielded to his original 'temptation', the result would have been critical accusation of Francomania, and irresponsible readers.

It could be argued that as Bennett is largely concerned with middle-class characters who possess a strong sense of will-power, it is therefore pointless and un-realistic to make life degrade them. Germinie Lacerteux is after all a servant. Gervaise too is very low on the social scale. Yet, Kate Ede is not merely at the same social level as Sophia but is from precisely the same Five Towns. She escapes from the area with a villain and she perishes. Sophia too escapes with a villain, but Bennett would not allow her to perish. The character who seems most likely to sink turns out to be fairly successful and to be of much the same mentality as those who choose to stay in the Five Towns and remain, though uncomfortably enough, part of it, enduring its repressive social atmosphere with a stoical resignation. In fact, the majority of Bennett's characters neither rise nor sink. What seems to sustain them is their middle-class determination, as James Hall argues:

The great thing determined for them is the possession of a strong middle-class will. The most frequently recurring scene in the novels is the moment in which Darius or Sophia or Hilda or even Edwin realizes the miracle of his career – that he has willed it to be so and it has been so. The triumphant will constantly defeats the naturalistic theory and practice which Bennett believed himself committed to.⁴⁹

Although Sophia certainly does not will Scales to be a scoundrel and to desert her in Paris, and Edwin certainly does not want to remain in Bursley to inherit Darius's printing-shop, these Five Towns figures do have a 'strong middle-class will' of their own. Thanks to this quality, they manage to lead lives of renouncement, fairly satisfied with their drab, materialistic social milieu. Thanks to this quality, Bennett did not feel compelled to make them decline irreversibly down the social scale to the level of their servants, or to

an even lower level, as would seem predictable from his professed commitment to the French realists and naturalists. The British middle class had always been more stable than its French counterpart. It maintained its comfort and respectability also with more persistence than its French counterpart. The relative stability of its social status determined the relative uneventfulness of its social life. To be true to reality, Bennett faithfully transcribed the relatively uneventful lives of the middle-class people he knew, either of the Five Towns or of London.

If Bennett's middle-class characters do not deteriorate, they can certainly be frustrated and defeated in their aspirations towards an artistic, literary, or any loftier form of life. Larch, Edwin, Cyril Povey, George Cannon of The Roll Call, Anna, even Sophia and Christine, are all such figures. Although they have a sort of desire to rise above the materialistic social environment in which they initially find themselves, to pursue intellectual, artistic, spiritual or emotional emancipation and fulfilment, they invariably fail in their attempts, which are devoid of vigour and determination. In a strictly sociological sense, they not only do not decline, but are invariably assured of material comfort. They could all be regarded as quite successful were material welfare the sole criterion of social success. Thus, the original pessimistic and defeatist formula of French realism and naturalism that individuals degrade economically and morally becomes radically modified in Bennett, so much so, that his literary practice can at most be regarded as only a remote echo of that of his forerunners. In the strict French sense, his pessimism and defeatism are quite un-developed.

Although Bennett's compromise with the British reading public and his pre-occupation with middle-class life were important factors in the dilution of the French element of his fiction, there are many indications that he also experienced a more conscious discontent with the fictional theories that had

moulded so much of his early work. It was pointed out in Chapter 3 that in 1899, shortly after the publication of A Man from the North and before he had written Anna of the Five Towns, he confided to his journal that his enthusiasm for 'realism' and 'naturalism' had passed, and that he could see no reason why 'a modern work of fiction dealing with modern life' should necessarily be 'realistic' at all. Such a perception did not, of course, mean that Bennett himself was moving away from naturalistic models. On the contrary, the French influence, as has been shown, remained dominant in him. But, the awareness that his French idols had not said the last word about fictional form also remained with him. Early in his career, he was conscious that contemporary French novelists were turning away from realism, as were the major novelists in Britain, like James and Conrad. In his many book reviews and articles he constantly praised the work of the nineteenth-century Russian novelists, and welcomed and publicized the work of younger British novelists like James Joyce and D. H. Lawrence. Bennett's inner doubts about the continuing relevance of French realism, in spite of his own practice, found expression in The Author's Craft. Pointing out that no fictional convention can bring the novelist 'within a hundred million miles of life itself,' he makes the following comment:

The defects of a new convention disclose themselves late in its career. The notion that 'naturalists' have at last lighted on a final formula which ensures truth to life is ridiculous. 'Naturalist' is merely an epithet expressing self-satisfaction.⁵⁰

In other words, it is only when one dominant fictional convention had exhausted its possibilities that it comes to be seen as a 'formula' rather than a final solution to the age-old problem of how an artist should portray life. Clearly, Bennett is not only making a general point, but is thinking specifically of his own early enthusiasm for French naturalism and the modification it had

undergone, though, of course, his admiration for naturalism had never led him into a mood of 'self-satisfaction'. A further criticism he makes of the French realists and naturalists – or rather, of some of them – concerns what he calls 'the defects of their minds.' This attitude develops out of the principle that:

A great novelist must have great qualities of mind. His mind must be sympathetic, quickly responsive, courageous, honest, humorous, tender, just, merciful. He must be able to conceive the ideal without losing sight of the fact that it is a human world we live in.⁵¹

That there was something morally deficient in French fiction was a constant complaint of late Victorian critics in Britain, though the younger Bennett would not have agreed with it. Now he describes Flaubert's 'mind' as 'not quite noble enough', and as 'cruel' and 'a little anaemic.' Bennett even claims that Maupassant along with Flaubert is 'inevitably falling in esteem to the level of the second-rate.'⁵²

In these various comments, it can be seen that what Bennett most wants to assert is that 'great' fiction cannot be defined in terms of a set of formal literary conventions, but depends instead on the depth and comprehensiveness of an individual novelist's personal interpretation of humanity. Great fiction is the expression of an 'impassioned vision of life.'⁵³ It is not only Flaubert and Maupassant who, in Bennett's opinion, fall short of this kind of artistic ideal: so do Dickens and Thackeray, while Fielding is hailed as 'unequalled among English novelists because the broad nobility of his mind is unequalled.'⁵⁴ As has already pointed out, an early entry in Bennett's journal stressed 'a Christ-like, all-embracing compassion' as the 'essential characteristic of the really great novelist', so his emphasis in The Author's Craft on the quality of mind and the humanity of the great novelist was not a new thought. What does mark a change in Bennett's view is the way that this quality is now given priority over the technical aspects of fiction. Bennett draws attention to his

change of mind on this point:

It is a hard saying for me, and full of danger in any country whose artists have shown contempt for form, yet I am obliged to say that, as years pass, I attach less and less importance to good technique in fiction.⁵⁵

Here is the reason for his sudden apparent downgrading of Flaubert and Maupassant. He still insists that he admires 'good technique in fiction' but explains that 'the modern history of fiction will not support' him.⁵⁶ There are now too many examples of great novelists – and among others he names in this instance, Balzac, Stendhal, and Dostoievsky – whose greatness is not dependent on the formal perfection of their work. What their work does have abundantly is 'passionate intensity of vision.'

Despite Bennett's relegation of the importance of technique in fiction, he is certainly arguing that it should not play a key part in a novel's success. Indeed, he says there are 'very few rules of design in the novel' but the few that there are are 'capital'.⁵⁷ Some of the examples he gives are especially interesting. He says that in a novel 'the interest must be centralised; it must not be diffused over various parts of the canvas,' and he goes on to explain that by 'interest' he means:

The interest of the story itself, and not the interest of the continual play of the author's mind on his material. In proportion as the interest of the story is maintained, the plot is a good one.⁵⁸

The author he chooses to support his conviction that this kind of artistic control is a matter of individual vision and not the following of set conventions, is Hardy. The plot of The Woodlanders, Bennett maintains, is 'one of the most exquisite examples of subtle symbolic illustration of an idea that a writer of fiction ever achieved.'⁵⁹

In several of his later novels Bennett can be seen attempting to apply the

principles and theories outlined here, and nowhere more effectively than in Riceyman Steps, which can be justly described as a 'subtle symbolic illustration of a idea.'

CHAPTER 8

TOWARDS SYMBOLISM

In a letter to Andre Gide dated 23 September, 1923 Bennett says:

I am just about to publish a novel Riceyman Steps, of which I will send you a copy. Scene - London. Type: realiste. Old-fashioned, of course.... We have several young novelists here who are trying to invent a form to supercede Balzac's. *They are not succeeding*. I also am trying, and almost succeeding. Still, I shall go on trying.¹

Clearly, Bennett was conducting some sort of literary experiment to show a younger generation of writers that, at fifty-six, he was far from finished as a novelist. His description of Riceyman Steps as 'realiste' and 'old-fashioned' is however, only half ironic. Although Riceyman Steps is in certain important respects very different from Bennett's earlier novels, it retains many characteristics of nineteenth-century French realism. The meticulous evocation of a dingy urban environment, the obsession with states of physical and psychological decline, and the claustrophobic nightmarish atmosphere within which an intense domestic drama takes place, were all common features of both French fiction and Bennett's own novels. There were also precedents, in both, for fictional studies of the psychology of misers, and of servants.² In writing Riceyman Steps Bennett was, therefore, working within traditions which could justifiably be described as 'realiste' and 'old-fashioned'. However, the artistic use to which Bennett put these various conventions and themes in Riceyman Steps, especially his structural use of symbolism, marked a new departure for him. This was the way he would challenge the 'young novelists'.

As has been pointed out, Bennett had never fully subscribed - at least in theory - to the photographic concept of realism. He had employed symbolism in his very first novel by slyly putting the oleograph 'After the Battle of Culloden' on the wall of Richard Larch's new abode in London to suggest

proleptically the eventual defeat of Larch's literary aspirations. The 'Priory' in Anna, as was shown in Chapter 4, is used as a satirical image of the futility and lovelessness of Anna's future married life. The sense of confinement permeating the Baines kitchen in the The Old Wives' Tale predicts the banality and insignificance of the lives of the Baines sisters. In the same novel, the horse-drawn rail car is used to humorously symbolize the self-complacency of the inhabitants of the Five Towns.³ As these few examples show, in his earlier novels Bennett had tended to use symbolism mainly for local and restricted purposes. In Riceyman Steps, however, his use of symbols is pervasive and of major thematic and structural significance.

The novel opens with the following description:

On an autumn afternoon of 1919 a hatless man with a slight limp might have been observed ascending the gentle, broad acclivity of Riceyman Steps, which lead from King's Cross Road up to Riceyman Square, in the great metropolitan industrial district of Clerkenwell. He was rather less than stout and rather more than slim. His thin hair had begun to turn from black to grey, but his complexion was still fairly good, and the rich, very red lips, under a small greyish moustache and over a short, pointed beard, were quite remarkable in their suggestion of vitality. As to his age, ...he must be past forty. The man himself was certainly entitled to say that he was in the prime of life. He wore a neat dark-grey suit, which must have been carefully folded at nights, a low, white, starched collar, and a 'made' black tie that completely hid the shirt-front; the shirt-cuffs could not be seen. He was shod in old, black leather slippers, well polished. He gave an appearance of quiet, intelligent, refined and kindly prosperity; and in his little eyes shone the varying lights of emotional sensitivities.⁴

Virtually all the details given here are shown, as the novel develops, to be deceptive. The immediate impression the description conveys of Henry Earlforward is that apart from having a slight limp, he is in the heyday of his life, both physically and socially. The impression of his 'vitality', 'prosperity' and 'emotional sensitivities' is further strengthened by his longing for the love of Violet Arb and his nostalgic dream of a past Clerkenwell which 'was a

murmuring green land of medicinal springs, wells, streams with mills on their banks, nunneries, aristocrats, and holy clerks who presented mystery plays.⁵ He is presented as an ordinary, perfectly respectable second-hand bookshop owner. Early in the novel, only some vague hints are given as to his real character – he does not use waterproof covers for the outside display of his books; he bargains with the woman he is in love with; and he has a 'passion', which for a long time remains undefined. Through a patient narrative, Bennett gradually undermines the initial positive impressions of Earlforward and establishes in a life-like manner the corrupted state of his inner self. Yet, it is only after a long period of fictional time that the horrible depths of the corruption is exposed. Earlforward is *the* miser, that paradoxical admixture of voracious psychological possessiveness and adamant physical self-denial. Underneath the appearance of respectability and prosperity is an irreversible moral decay, which leads him to physical decline and eventual annihilation. His 'rich red lips' and 'emotional sensitivities' end in only utter sexual sterility and the almost total negation of basic human qualities.

However, Earlforward is not the only miser of Riceyman Steps. Violet Arb has a strong miserly disposition and can be seen as a kind of female counterpart of Earlforward. Early in the story she is shown to be 'bright, cheerful, with scintillating eyes' and to have 'life, energy'.⁶ Both Earlforward and Mrs Arb are shown not to lack vitality and to appear capable of love. However, what really attracts Earlforward to Violet Arb is an inner quality of hers which is more or less equivalent to his. Despite her outward vivacity and his apparent appreciation of it, he understands that 'it would have been just about the same if she had been a gloomy woman.'⁷ The love theme and the miser theme of the novel are inseparable. Earlforward's flair for the right kind of woman that suits him is further testified by the discovery that she is as parsimonious as himself and even surpasses him in cheating Elsie the

charwoman. When offering Elsie the position of a 'general' for the new household, Violet Arb manages to make Elsie accept an annual salary of twenty pounds:

'Suppose you start with twenty pounds? Of course it's very high, but wages are high in these days. I don't know why. But they are. And we have to put up with it.'

'Very well, 'm,' Elsie agreed gratefully.

Twenty pounds seemed a big lump of money to her, and she could not divide by fifty-two. Besides, there it was, printed in the paper!⁸

Love is thus strengthened by the new revelation that Violet has 'every quality'⁹ Romance based upon a cold monetary instinct/intellect is bound to result in a sexual 'limp' despite Earlforward's 'fairly good complexion' and Violet's 'energy'. Frustrated in her effort to persuade Earlforward to eat the steak later in the novel, the somewhat reformed Violet Earlforward flings her furious condemnation at her husband: 'Love? You know a lot about it! Cold by day and cold by night.'¹⁰

Corresponding to Earlforward's brand of courtship is his peculiar mode of chivalry, which suits perfectly his false notion of femininity. Unwilling to spend money on the wedding-ring, Earlforward sells Mr Arb's old ring to buy Violet a new one, exhibiting his gallantry by declaring that he has gained 'six and sixpence more' by such traffic. Earlforward's maleness, however, is best spelled out by presenting Violet, as a surprise, a large heavy safe as his wedding-gift to her. The ancient virtue of chivalry, with its positive associations of assurance, fecundity and continuity of human life (remote as they might seem in this case), is symbolically relegated to an infecund commercial act and a cold barren metal device for hoarding (hoarding for hoarding's sake, not for future production). So the imagery of the ring and the safe, which defines the true nature of the Violet-Earlforward relationship, is incorporated in the incident in which, Elsie, who cannot count, is cheated. The

overall symbolic meaning of such narrative is that in the Earlforwards' world, basic human needs are subjugated to a value which is false and inhuman and yields, if it *can* yield anything, only infertility and the consequent annihilation of human life. Combining the miser theme and the love theme, Bennett not only makes an original contribution to the already long gallery of misers in literature, but also exhibits an uneasiness about an increasingly commercialized society.

In contrast to the Earlforwards, Elsie is described as:

A strongly-built wench, plump, fairly tall, with the striking free, powerful carriage of one bred to various and hard manual labour. Her arms and bust were superb. She had blue-black hair and dark blue eyes, and a pretty curve of the lips. The face was square but soft. From the constant drawing together of the eyebrows into a pucker of the forehead, and the dropping of the corners of the large mouth, it could be deduced that she was, if anything, over-conscientious, ...but this warping of her features was too slight to be unpleasant.¹¹

Her portrait conveys strength, wholeness and vitality. As the story develops, it becomes increasingly clear that she serves many symbolic functions. It is her part as a go-between that makes the courtship and marriage of Violet Arb and Earlforward possible, fruitless and destructive as the marriage will turn out in the end. Not only is she a formative factor in the Arb-Earlforward universe, she is also a remedial and stabilizing element, as can be seen in her voluntarily fetching Dr Raste for the sick Earlforwards, in her constructively suggesting to Earlforward that he write a letter to Violet who is going to have an operation in the hospital, and in her masterfully managing the Earlforward household when it is experiencing its final crisis. Yet she is by no means adequately described as a menial who is 'dominated and obsessed by a tremendous instinct to serve'.¹² She represents light as opposed to the claustrophobic dark of the Earlforward household: 'every morning [she] breathed the breath of life into the dead nocturnal house, and revived it, and

turned it once again from a dark, irresponsive, meaningless and deathlike keep into a human habitation.¹³ She is also an concrete image of warmth as opposed to the general cold prevailing in *T. T. Riceyman*, as can be seen in the chapter 'On the Landing' where she takes the 'timid' initiative in proposing to light a fire, which is later a 'relief' for Violet Earlforward in her desperate struggle to get Earlforward to the hospital.¹⁴ Even the moment when she allows Violet Arb to deprive her of an extra evening's time (doubly precious for her since the day is her lover Joe's birthday) for only 'a slice of ham' and 'sixpence extra' is not a simple act of docility.¹⁵ For Violet Arb's cheaply obtained information about Earlforward during the courtship, their marriage will later pay the full price, as the symbolic framework of Riceyman Steps suggests.

While Violet Arb early in the novel can only dream of 'masculine guidance or protection',¹⁶ Elsie is engaged in an active love affair with her fellow workman Joe which is characterized by life-force and naturalness:

It was raining again, with a squally wind.... A young woman ran out of Mrs Arb's and joined him. She placed herself close to him, touching him, breast to breast; it was the natural and rational thing to do, and also she had to receive as much protection as possible from the umbrella. The girl was wearing all Elsie's clothes. Elsie's sack-apron covered her head and shoulders like a bridal veil. But she was not Mrs Arb's Elsie nor Mr Earlforward's! She was not the drudge. She had suddenly become a celestial visitant.¹⁷

As the story unfolds, Joe proves an effective emotional and psychological 'umbrella' for Elsie even though he is physically absent. Whereas Violet Arb, transformed into Mrs Earlforward, can have only a 'placid', 'bland', 'slow', 'cold' and, above all, limping Earlforward as her 'umbrella' – a broken one in emotional, psychological as well as physical terms.

If Elsie plays a key part in the formation of the Arb-Earlforward union, its continuity requires an even heavier dependence on her. The Earlforwards

employ her as their full-time servant because of her 'reliability' and 'cheapness'. Upon the wedding day of the Earlfowards, Elsie literally acts as a 'priestess' and conducts a wedding ceremony for them, which Henry Earlforward at least has 'unconventionally' planned to dispense with. In their absorption in the matter of the unique wedding-gift - the safe - the Earlfowards have forgotten Elsie, but Elsie has not forgotten them:

She was carrying a parcel in her left hand, and the other was behind her back.... Elsie, from the advantage of three stairs, suddenly showed her right hand, and out of a paper bag flung a considerable quantity of rice on to the middle-aged persons of the married. She accomplished this gesture with the air of a benevolent priestess performing a necessary and gravely important rite.¹⁸

And there is the 'authentic' cake. Its cutting is ritually conducted and it is orgiastically consumed by the newly-wedded:

They could afford to be young and to live perilously, madly, absurdly. They lost control of themselves, and gloried in so doing. The cake was a danger to existence. It had the consistency of marble, the richness of molasses, the mysteriousness of the enigma of the universe. It seemed unconquerable. It seemed more fatal than daggers or gelignite. But they attacked it. Fortunately, neither of them knew the inner meaning of indigestion. When Henry had taken the last slice, Violet exclaimed like a child: 'Oh, just one tiny piece more!' And with burning eyes she bent down and bit off a morsel from the slice in Henry's hand. 'I'm living!' shouted an unheard voice in Henry's soul.¹⁹

Thus in Earlforward's false self-revelation and Violet's complete satisfaction is consummated the Elsie-organized wedding-ceremony. Here is an exhibition of the real power of Earlforward's 'rich red lips' and of Violet's 'energy'. As in the case of Earlforward's 'delusion of having driven a unique bargain with Elsie in the matter of wages', the delusively 'free' cake triggers off a violent breakdown of Earlforward's long-cherished ethic of 'neither-to-bestow-nor-to-receive'.²⁰ The immediate consequence of the violation is Earlforward's 'indigestion',

which turns out to be stomach cancer. The cake of good will eventually brings about only the reverse result – the sterility and dissolution not only of the marriage but also of the married couple themselves.²¹ So Elsie is made to appear the vehicle, unconscious as it seems, of not only the creation but also the destruction of the Arb-Earlforward marriage.

The imagery of orgy in the cake episode not only marks the beginning of the Earlforwards' decline, it also constitutes Riceyman Step's unifying symbol, providing Bennett with the means by which he can gradually reveal the fatal depths of Earlforward's moral decay and spell out the central contrasts in the novel between fertility and sterility, constructiveness and destructiveness, and innocence and corrupted sophistication. It also helps to highlight the contrast between Earlforward's faith in neither-to-bestow-nor-to-receive and Elsie's practice of give-and-take. The former attitude leads to stagnation and destruction of life and the latter to vitality and continuity of life. Backed by the potent excuse of 'indigestion', Earlforward's 'grand passion' speeds to a full gallop, carrying him rapidly towards supreme self-denial, winning successive victories in the battles of the steak and the hospital (defeating the remedial efforts of Violet, Elsie and Dr Raste), and ultimately taking him to physical annihilation. Yet, unconquerable as the 'passion' might be, Earlforward does achieve some kind of self-knowledge before he dies: 'Work! Work! The reconstruction of his life.'²² But this is only a faint, belated awareness. He is denied the realization that his life has been an utter futility, that he has not really lived, that it has consisted in a safe. In a time of revolutions and riots, everything is unreal to him but gold:

If some of those fellows across the road in Great Warner Street get their way, a five-pound note won't buy a loaf of bread.... It's happened in other countries and it'll happen here. And then where will you be, with your gilt-edged securities? ...But I'll tell you one thing that communism and socialism and murder and so on won't spoil, and it'll always be of good value.²³

It is beside the 'impregnable fortress' of gold that Earlforward dies. The 'locked-up, cast-iron' safe efficiently embodies both his theory and life.

Just as the safe is 'locked-up', so the state of the shop itself is in an equally confined state. The claustrophobic T. T. Riceyman ruled by a corrupted mentality is created not merely to portray a miser and his two slaves. The shop has a 'picturesque air', is in its 'right appropriate place' and 'reinforces' the 'appeal of its environment', which is all 'out-worn shabbiness, grime and decay'.²⁴ It possesses a window that is 'irresistible' for 'the secret race of collectors always ravenously desiring to get something for much less than its real value.'²⁵ 'Dark', 'untidy' and 'gloomy', it contains numerous bookshelves which hold 'vast populations of books imprisoned, chained, deprived of air and sun and movement, hopeless, resigned, martyred.'²⁶ Such a sealed atmosphere is the natural element of a sealed psychology which equates with total moral putridity. The inner state of corruption has its principal outward manifestation in the abundant dust the shop possesses - 'the blue-black blind', slipping down, discharges 'thick clouds of dust' and 'the porcelain shade of the lamp wore a heavy layer of dust.'²⁷ Cherished by its owner, the dirt proves immune from any effort to get rid of it. The effect of Violet's wedding-gift turns out a complete failure, as the accumulation of dirt in the shop is 'resistless', regardless of two women's cleaning with a 'most regular periodicity.'²⁸ The ineradicable dirt is indeed an image of the person who exhibits grave concern for its value when the customary peace of the shop is disturbed by the vacuum-cleaning. Corrupted as the establishment and its owners are, it does have its own 'picturesqueness' and allure. Cheated and humiliated by the owners of the shop, the American customer Bauersch 'well knew that on his next visit he would come into the damned shop again, because the shop had the goods he wanted, and didn't care whether he bought them or not... it was the shop's cursed indifference that spiritually beat

him and ensured the triumph of the astonishing system.²⁹ Seen in this light, T. T. Riceyman, associated with 'true ancient blood', might well be regarded as a miniature projection of the old world, and Riceyman Steps, a hyperbolic vision of a civilization which is crisis-stricken yet has all its weird sophistication.

Diametrically opposed to the symbolism of Earlforward/safe/shop is the image of Elsie, who is always 'open'. As has already been pointed out, she obligingly sacrifices the celebration of Joe's birthday for Violet Arb's sake and voluntarily (though not without other motives) fetches Dr Raste for the sick Earlforwards. Her selflessness is abundant. If her willingness to 'give' in her relationship towards the master class - the Earlforwards - is tinged with reservation, her devotion to her own kind - Joe - is unreserved. Always ready to 'bestow', Elsie is equally ready to 'receive'. She serves as a sound image of the full satisfaction of basic human needs, instinctively defying social and moral convention. Throughout Riceyman Steps, she is shown to steal food from the Earlforwards' 'cage' and kitchen whenever she is hungry. The egg declined by Earlforward is consumed by Elsie. The steak refused by Earlforward as a result of the victory of his 'passional' self over his physical self, becomes a tribute, spiritual as well as biological, to the irresistible life-force in Elsie:

She examined the fragment [of the steak]. A mouthful; no more! ... She picked up the fragment out of curiosity...and in an instant the fragment had vanished. The fragment did not seem to go into her stomach; it divided itself into a thousand parts, which ran through all her veins like fire, more potent than brandy, more dreadfully inspiring than champagne. From this moment the steak was turned into a basilisk, with a devilish, sinister fascination for her. She ceased to wash up...began to feel her self-respect slipping away, her honour slipping away, all right-mindedness slipping away, under the basilisk's stare of the steak.³⁰

Here Bennett the realist becomes Bennett the surrealist. Although the tone is

not without irony, the praise of an instinctive yielding to natural force is effusive. Such eulogistic treatment of Elsie's eating confers upon it a spiritual significance which transcends the fatally distorted morality of Earlforward. The eating-motif is further strengthened in the 'Midnight' chapter, where, driven by hunger, Elsie is shown to be consuming, almost ritually, the Earlforwards' cheese, cold potatoes and a piece of bread crust: 'She ate slowly, enjoying with deliberation each morsel. After all she had one positive pleasure in life.'³¹ Another recapitulation of the eating-motif is to be found in the 'Night-Call' chapter, where Elsie, 'eating bacon raw', is caught on the spot by Violet Earlforward.³² After the Earlforwards' union has completely dissolved, the eating-motif is given a final emphasis against the background of the Clerkenwell's general excitement about the 'disappearance' of the T. T. Riceyman: 'They [Elsie and Joe] were dumb and happy in the island of homeliness around which swirled the tide of dissolution and change. Elsie picked up a piece of bread-and-butter from a plate and began to eat it.'³³ Parallel to the theme of eating is Elsie's kissing. Early in the novel Bennett extols her affectionate manner in kissing Joe to compensate for her cancellation of the birthday celebration:

With her free hand she worked up the tail of her apron between them, and, while still fast in his clutch, wiped his eyes delicately. She kissed him, keeping her lips on his. She kissed him until she knew from the feel of his muscles everywhere that the warm soft contact with her had begun to dissolve his resentment. Then she withdrew her lips and kissed him again, differently.³⁴

In the chapter 'Out of the Rain' she kisses the malarial Joe 'again and again'. Later on she kisses Jerry Perkins 'fully'. The final kiss is conducted when T. T. Riceyman is being prepared for its new master. The imagery of Elsie's eating and kissing is thus incorporated into the symbolic framework of Riceyman Steps, establishing her part as a supreme embodiment of strength,

fecundity and continuity of human life. Violating the law of metabolism (not only in its biological sense), the Earlforward system ends in stagnation and extinction. Abiding by this law, Elsie is endowed with life-force and the role of carrying on human existence.

An important point emerging from the symbolic approach of Riceyman Steps as shown above is the simultaneity, even mutual complementarity, usually in the form of contrast, of the opposite notions of fertility and sterility, and of life and death. It is virtually one night that separates the creation of the Arb-Earlforward union and its beginning to decay. As has been argued previously, the courtship and marriage, for all their associations of human reproduction, of Violet and Henry Earlforward are carried out in barren monetary terms. The life-giving food refused by Earlforward becomes Elsie's 'dreadfully inspiring' nourishment. The Earlforwards' starvation of themselves is in sharp contrast with Elsie's instinctive stealing of food regardless of 'morals', which, of course, leads to health and strength. In fact, Elsie's vitality is so powerful that 'not even the atmosphere of death could cure Elsie of her vice' – her 'eating bacon raw' with a 'gluttonous, ecstatic expression' on her face is made to occur simultaneously with Earlforward's experiencing the 'sinister' 'coffee-grounds vomit'. The revelation of the fatality of the master's illness *has* to be juxtaposed with the servant's 'ecstatic' outburst of life-force.³⁵ Violet already dead, Earlforward soon to die, Joe lying ill secretly in Elsie's room, Elsie, although hesitatingly, obliges the audacious boy Jerry Perkins by giving him the kiss that he begs for. 'Amour' is to be conducted to the full despite the deadly atmosphere and 'shame'.³⁶ More importantly, in spite of her great care and anxiety in hiding the fact that a servant's lover is being scandalously looked after in the dying master's house, Elsie is effusively affectionate in her love for Joe. Earlforward's death and Joe's recovery occurring simultaneously, the tired Elsie falls 'asleep' – the necessary condition for renewal of energy

and continuity of life.

The wedding-cake is not without some mystic tinge. The Arb-Earlforward world begins to dissolve immediately after the cake scene. Bennett makes it clear that the cake is a 'danger to existence', it has 'the mysteriousness of the enigma of the universe' and seems 'more fatal than daggers or gelignite'. In a superficial sense, 'indigestion' seems to be the logical consequence of such physical avarice. Yet, the 'indigestion' has an 'inner meaning'. Immediately before his death, Earlforward is shown to ascribe the cause of his illness to the cake: 'A queer affair, that indigestion! He had never suffered from indigestion until the day after his wedding-night, when he had eaten so immoderately Elsie's wedding-cake.'³⁷ At successive stages of the novel, Elsie is described with the words and phrases 'priestess', 'heavenly kindness', 'mysterious', 'unexplored arcana of her mind', 'celestially benevolent', 'miraculously lifted a sinister spell', 'magical power', 'angelical kindness', and 'God-send...'³⁸ As soon as the ceremonial cutting of the cake is finished, Elsie resumes her lay role as a charwoman:

They heard her with hand-brush and dustpan collecting the scattered food of the Orient. She peeped in at the door again. 'Good night, 'm. Good night, sir.' She saluted them with a benignant grin in which was *a surprising little touch of naughtiness*³⁹ [my italics]

Throughout the novel, there is a recurring suggestion Elsie is a kind of omniscient figure who in her mysterious way alone understands the 'enigma of the universe', in contrast to the logical ignorance of the whole of Riceyman Steps, including that of the sympathetic Dr Raste. At the end of Riceyman Steps, she is shown to be contemplating the tragic deaths of the Earlforwards:

She held Mr Earlforward responsible for her mistress's death, but her notions of the value of evidence were somewhat crude. And,

similarly, she held herself responsible for her master's death. She had noticed that he had never been the same since the orgy of her wedding-cake, and she had a terrible suspicion that immoderate wedding-cake caused cancer. Thus she added one more to the uncounted theories of the origin of cancer, and nobody yet knows enough of the subject to be able to disprove Elsie's theory.⁴⁰

Elsie's 'theory' is made more reliable than that of Charles Belrose, which ascribes the Earlforwards' death to bad luck. It seems more authentic than Dr Raste's, which medically asserts that the cause of Violet Earlforward's fibroid growth is 'Change of life. No children.'⁴¹ It even threatens to disprove the theory established by the inquest that Earlforward dies of 'a cancer at the junction of the gullet and the cardiac end of the stomach.'⁴² Elsie's theory undoubtedly possesses an authority of which all the other theories are deprived. Bennett seems to suggest that, as well as being a 'priestess', Elsie is an unconscious witch-figure and, in practising her craft with the cake, is responsible for the destruction of the Earlforwards. As though to echo her effort in the cake scene to ensure the witch-craft effect of the cake by reverentially (subversively in the final analysis) saluting Henry and Violet Earlforward, who are left to consume the cake undisturbed, with a 'Good night' for each, Elsie is shown at the end of Riceyman Steps to be dutifully wearing mourning for her deceased master and mistress. When the whole of Clerkenwell are laughing at Earlforward as an 'oddity' and psychologically excommunicating him and his wife from the region, 'Violet and Henry did...survive in one place, Elsie's heart.'⁴³ So Elsie is made to appear as someone who speeds Earlforwards not only to marriage, but also to death. She is indeed a genuine 'wonder' to the Earlforwards, as they thought when eating her cake.⁴⁴ Although 'the sight of the formidable pantehnicon [to renovate T.T. Riceyman for its new master Charles Belrose], squatted in the steps, brought moisture into her eyes', the pathos (more from the point of

view of the author/narrator than from that of Elsie) is quickly curbed by the smile of Elsie and Joe: 'Joe, fully dressed for the grand exodus, sat waiting on the sole chair. He smiled. Dropping the bag, she smiled. They kissed. ...He saw within the ill-fitting mourning a saviour, a powerful protectress, a bright angel.'⁴⁵ Thus the servant's love prospers in the master's death. Elsie cannot spare the 'kiss' even in mourning. This cold, cynically ironic situation is reminiscent of the Priory episode in Anna and of the closing scene of The Old Wives' Tale when Constance has died and the apparently immortal Charles Critchlow is said to attend her funeral 'with gusto, contentedly absorbed in the task of burying his friends one by one.'⁴⁶ In Riceyman Steps, Bennett still retained a typical realist's cynical detachment on the issue of death.

Despite Elsie's 'tremendous instinct to serve', the sociological message that the Elsie-Earlforwards relationship conveys is that the strife between classes is intense under the surface phenomenon of peace. Bennett reiterates that Elsie's voluntary actions to 'serve' are invariably mingled with other 'motives'. She cleans the window of T. T. Riceyman at the risk of her life not because she is 'loyal', but because the day is the anniversary of Joe's disappearance and Joe is 'famous for the super-excellence of his window-cleaning'.⁴⁷ Her fetching Dr Raste to the sick Earlforwards on her own initiative seems a constructive remedial effort, yet Bennett says explicitly that the main reason for her action is the superstitious hope that Joe may return on that day. When attention is drawn towards the pathos and irony in Earlforward's words 'I'm not quite so stout as I was' – the truth is that he has never been 'stout' and, having been ill for long, is now 'a stick, a skeleton' – a tear drop runs down Elsie's cheek, but Bennett once again makes it clear the tear is not simply an expression of sympathy for a dying master; instead, it is engendered by the servant's contemplation of 'the enigma of the universe'.⁴⁸ If Elsie is both creative and destructive to the Earlforward world, there is no doubt that she is

entirely constructive and resuscitative in her relationship to Joe. The violent behaviour of the shell-shocked Joe to Violet Arb, the immediate cause of which is of course the latter's selfish pursuit of her ends, leads to Elsie's banishing him from her life for roughly a year. By the end of this period, when Joe comes back, Violet Earlforward has died and Earlforward himself is dying. In the chapter 'The Two Patients', when Elsie is taking care of both Earlforward and Joe, she is shown to prefer her master to die – if one of the patients is to die – despite her being an 'angelically kind and unselfish creature' and in spite of her 'solemn promise' not to desert him:

Supposing one of them died on her hands before the morning, or that both of them died! ...If anyone was to die she wanted it to be Mr Earlforward. More, she could not help wishing that Mr Earlforward would in any case die.⁴⁹

The timing of Joe's return is not without irony. If Violet Arb unconsciously causes the banishment of Joe for one year in order to secure the love of Earlforward, at the end of that year, the fruit of her effort, the Arb-Earlforward union, is almost totally destroyed, Elsie equally being the unconscious cause of the destruction.

Apart from the retributive outcome of the ingenuity of the 'slice-of-ham-and-sixpence-extra' type, Violet Arb's exploitation of Elsie's time is also the cause of Joe's violent assault on her. This is one of the many references in the novel to the riotous political atmosphere of the time. Such allusions suggest that whatever a servant's 'kindness', 'reliability' and 'loyalty', she or he belongs fundamentally to the servant class and that the conflict between this class, its collective consciousness being symbolized by Elsie, and that of masters is essentially irreconcilable. Testing Riceyman Steps against the broader political situations of the time and bearing in mind Bennett's conservative political stance, Elsie, with her cake, is ultimately subversive of a

socio-economic structure whose ruling elements are the *too* possessive Earlforwards. Bennett is elaborating an apocalyptical warning through his novel to a greedy employer class of the insecurity of their status and urging them to make more concessions, social, economic and political, to the Elsie of the world. As a matter of fact, Elsie, in a rather special way, becomes the 'master' of T. T. Riceyman. Seen in this light, Riceyman Steps can be regarded as not only a realistic document of the class relationships of the time, but also an artistic repercussion of the revolutions and political riots of Europe from 1917 to the early 1920s.

As the story of Riceyman Steps unfolds, more and more pity is bestowed upon the Earlforwards, in contrast to the sardonic treatment of their thief-like behaviour in cheating Elsie in the earlier chapters. If Earlforward is only grudgingly allowed some degree of self-knowledge immediately before his death, Violet is treated in much more positive terms. Her wedding-gift to her husband – the vacuum-cleaning of the shop – is ridiculous, but it does bring fresh air and order to a place that has long been dusty and disorderly and mark the beginning of a 'new era' in T. T. Riceyman. This aspect of her is efficiently symbolized by the plant-pots:

She established the plant-pots on the window-sill. She had bought bulbs with the ten shillings so startlingly given to her by her husband, and with his reluctant approval. She had scrubbed the old plant-pots, stirred the soil in them, and embedded the bulbs. She put the pots out in the day-time and brought them in at night; she watered them when necessary in the bathroom. she tended them like a family of children. All unseen, they were the romance of her daily existence, her refuge from trouble, the balm of her anxieties.⁵⁰

During their courtship, Violet had criticized Earlforward for neglecting his plant-pots. Now, conferring upon her the quality of 'romance', Bennett allows her to be saved from the extremism of Earlforward's corruption. Early in the novel, Violet is shown to fancy music halls, dance halls, and to be critical of

Clerkenwell's lack of these facilities. Although she cheats Elsie, she displays much more tolerance to Elsie's stealing food than Earlforward, who 'plots' to stop the theft by appealing, 'righteously' yet foolishly, to morals. It is only after their marriage that Violet realizes the horror of her husband's 'passion', which at first appears to be merely parsimony. She becomes increasingly (and painfully) aware that she is in a dangerous psychological swirl. Her tragedy consists in her inability, with all her awareness of it, to get her husband and herself out of that state. She is dominated by, and estranged from, a man who in turn is enslaved and consumed by the 'monster' in him. She is in fact buried alive together with a moving (or limping) corpse. Her efforts to exorcize the 'evil' that prevails in T. T. Riceyman, though a failure, evokes pathos and sympathy. If Elsie is an unmistakable image of light and warmth in the dark cold Earlforward household, Violet, to a lesser extent, also represents light, as is made clear by Bennett: 'Violet unlocked the door and let in the morn, and shivered at the tonic. This act of opening the shop-door...seemed to mark another stage in the process which Elsie had begun more than two hours earlier.'⁵¹ In a word, she is a martyr to a diabolically distorted morality, as is suggested by the title 'The Scapegoat' of the book Bauersch buys from the shop and the name 'St. Bartholomew' of the hospital where she is operated on and dies.

Although Bennett's attitude to all of the characters in the novel is, in varying degrees, sympathetic, a problem of interpretation with regard to Elsie remains. Is she, with her cake, the real cause of the destruction of the Earlforwards? The symbolic framework of Riceyman Steps seems to yield such an interpretation. Bennett, however, offers at least a hint, vague as it is, of his own stand: 'The bride-cake seemed to have been the determining cause, or perhaps it was merely the occasion, of some change in his system.'⁵² Seen in this light, the ultimate cause of the perishing of the Earlforwards lies in the

core of the values that they hold, Earlforward in particular. In this connection, the result of the inquest is certainly of symbolic significance. In a superficial sense, the 'immoderate' eating of the cake causes the cancer, as both Earlforward and Elsie are made to believe. At a deeper level, Earlforward's 'system', more of a moral than a physical nature, has been in a putrid condition for long. Any 'change' would have had the same effect as the cake. The marriage itself is as much a 'change' as the cake. In a word, greed is the cancer. Earlforward is not a Shylock, who amasses a fortune, but uses it for revenge. Nor is he a M. Grandet, who scrimps, and hoards money only to breed more money. Earlforward's 'passion' is pure, in itself and for itself, exercising a powerfully destructive dominance over him, his wife, even Elsie. Deprived of its commercial and other associations, Earlforward's miserliness acquires a universal significance which is lacking in the previous misers in literature, thereby conferring on Riceyman Steps an air of a modernistic moral fable which aims to be a remedial exhortation to a sick civilization. There is no doubt that Earlforward's values are false. His vision of reality, as has been pointed out before, is a safe. Yet, avarice manifests itself not only in extreme psychological possessiveness but also in physical orgy. The 'rich red lips' not merely voraciously 'attack' a cake. Earlforward is not at all sexless, as some critics maintain. This can be seen clearly in the chapter 'The Day Before'. Even when death is drawing near, he does not fail to notice Elsie's sexual appeal: 'for the first time he saw her, not as a charwoman turned servant, but as a girl charged with energetic life; and her benevolence had rendered her beautiful.'⁵³ The implication of the intemperance of the couple in eating the cake on the bridal night could be a sexual intemperance after the cake is finished. So the Earlfords' passionate response to the cake is both orgiastic and orgasmic.

Elsie, as well as the author, is aware of the horrible depth of Earlforward's avarice – this explains her 'surprisingly little touch of naughtiness' when she

leaves the newly-wedded couple to enjoy her cake undisturbed. Despite her ignorance or 'stupidity', she in all her simplicity intuitively comprehends the falsity and fatality of the values that Earlforward holds. She has a far more acute perception of the profundity of Earlforward's corruption than Violet. In her 'mysterious' primitiveness and in her irresistible life-force is inherent a sophistication which is perfectly sound and which modern civilization, as seen by Bennett, lacks. Bennett is in a sense proposing the image of Elsie as a possible cure for a crisis-stricken society. At successive stages of the novel, Elsie says of Earlforward: 'He's not himself, master isn't'; 'He'll never get up again.'⁵⁴ These remarks invariably irritate Violet who, unwilling to admit the truth, somehow still adheres to the false vision of the soundness of the putrifying old world. In this connection, the image of the truth-denying Violet is of broader symbolic significance. Ignorant of medicine, Elsie instinctively 'feels', rather than diagnoses as does Dr Raste, the fatalness of the Earlforwards' illness: 'She thought of her presentiment of the previous evening but one: " This will be the last time I shall ever wheel in the bookstand." And she had a firm conviction that in that presentiment she had by some magical power seen acutely into the future.'⁵⁵ Elsie, with her 'magical power', 'knew' the decaying state Earlforward is in long before Violet violates his celibacy, his dust and the order of his old books, as is suggested by the withdrawn Earlforward's heavy reliance on her for not only physical comfort but also psychological tranquility:

He found, as usual, a mysterious comfort in her presence; and this influence of hers exercised itself even upon his fear of losing her for ever. A strange, exciting emotional equilibrium became established in the twilight of the shop.⁵⁶

Although the engrained moral decay sooner or later leads to physical annihilation regardless of its deceitful appearance of 'refinement', 'sensitivity'

and 'vitality', the real tragedy of Earlforward is his reluctance or inability to face the truth. Violet, an outsider to his universe to a considerable extent, forces him to stand up to it, foiling his tragi-comic efforts at concealment. Compelling Earlforward to confront the reality that she is a 'slave' of him and he in turn is a slave of that 'monster' in him, Violet 'transformed the domestic interior from heaven to hell.'⁵⁷ However, her reformatory effort is futile. Worse than that, she in turn is reluctant to face the truth that she is as ill as Earlforward (not merely physically, since she allows herself to be enslaved by the will of an avarice/cancer Earlforward without taking any decisive measure to get at least herself out of the fatal psychological abyss). It is up to Elsie, the outsider to the Earlforward union in the T. T. Riceyman trio, to force Violet to stand up to the truth: ' "Oh *mum!* Why you've been ill for weeks!" Violet blushed like a culprit.'⁵⁸ So, as the sealed atmosphere of the shop suggests, its owners display a fatal penchant for sealing up the truth.

The various possible meanings of the wedding-cake could also be explained in philosophic terms. Bennett in fact says explicitly that it contains 'the mysteriousness of the enigma of the universe'. Earlforward abandons his long celibacy and Violet Arb her widowhood only to embark upon an ill-fated rapid journey to death. At a realistic level, Riceyman Steps credibly transcribes the servant-master relationship of the time. It also suggests, as has been pointed out, that, at a symbolic level, the cake, as well as Elsie herself, is a curse to the Earlforward universe. There is little doubt that Bennett is more sympathetic to Elsie than to the Earlfords. He was politically conservative but this did not constitute a reason for him to be hostile (or condescending) to a servant, and to be more than he actually is sympathetic towards a miser. He displays somehow an agnostic stand in the novel. Regarding Elsie's sacrificing her beloved dream of an independent comfortable home with Joe to satisfy Miss Raste's caprice of having *her* as

her servant, Bennett remarks:

This was indeed a very strange episode, upsetting as it did all optimistic theories about the reasonableness of human nature and the influence of logic over the springs of conduct. No one quite knew where he was.⁵⁹

In The Religious Interregnum (1929) he observes that physical phenomena, though 'concrete' and 'marvellous', 'cannot but attract more powerfully than cloudy speculations upon the ultimate beginning and the ultimate end of life.'⁶⁰ Seen in this light, Riceyman Steps expresses a doubt on Bennett's part as regards the nature of reality or existence. He seems to argue that, as Mr Riceyman's narrative of the construction of the Underground tunnel, human existence is an endless and purposeless flow of bustling activities, a perpetually puzzling cycle of endeavour, frustration and acceptance. Of course the meaning of Mr Riceyman's story could also be that modern civilization is both alluring and disappointing.

Despite Elsie's positive image, the ultimate balm and cure for a sick civilization comes not from her but the Doctor (the profession itself is symbolic). Elsie is an embodiment of fertility and sound simplicity, but she is expected to remain a servant to Dr Raste as the ending of Riceyman Steps and its sequel 'Elsie and the Child' make clear. For all her selflessness and physical and psychological health, she can be definitely wrong about the doctor's genuine generosity: sending her quinine which she has asked for Joe and has suspected that he will not send out of snobbery, he makes her 'ashamed of her uncharitable judgement on him.'⁶¹ On his appearance in the T. T. Riceyman world, 'Violet ceased to look guilty'; even Earlforward, with the 'monster' in him, 'ceased to ape the person of vigorous health.'⁶² Although a minor character, Dr Raste is presented as a figure of righteousness, intelligence, and humanity. He has every ingredient that a society needs in

order to be healthy. If any saviour of a decaying civilization is to descend from the height of Riceyman Steps, it is undoubtedly the Doctor. He is a rare example in Bennett's work of an idealized character, created in a quite Dickensian manner out of Bennett's intense, even desperate, anxiety about a crisis-stricken time. Yet, however seedy the environment of Clerkenwell and however claustrophobic T. T. Riceyman, Riceyman Steps is not a panorama of a waste land. The Earlforwards are dead but the type they represent is not. Human existence is still of value and is to continue. This mission Bennett allots to the fundamentally human Dr Raste and Elsie.

notes

ABBREVIATIONS:

C: Clayhanger

HL: Hilda Lessways

L: Leonora

MN: A Man from the North

OWT: The Old Wives' Tale

PL: The Pretty Lady

RS: Riceyman Steps

SPL: Sacred and Profane Love

TT: These Twain

WGJ: Whom God hath Joined

* Unless indicated otherwise, Newman Flower's edition of Bennett's journals, The Journals of Arnold Bennett (3 vol., 1932-3), is used throughout the thesis.

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35. C, p. 129.
36. TT, p. 137.
37. John Lucas, Arnold Bennett (1975), p. 182.
38. The Pretty Lady (1918), p. 209.
39. PL, p. 181.
40. Lucas, p. 183.
41. PL, p. 62.
42. James Hepburn, The Art of Arnold Bennett (1963), p. 140.
43. Lucas, p. 207.
44. Leonora (1903), p. 37.
45. L, p. 318.
46. OWT, p. 544.
47. OWT, pp. 564–5.

48. OWT, p. 566.
49. OWT, p. 510.
50. C, p. 307.
51. TT, p. 103.
52. TT, p. 103.
53. C, p. 497.
54. TT, p. 414.
55. Lucas, pp. 142–3.
56. C, pp. 418–9.
57. The Roll Call (1918), p. 237.
58. Lucas, p. 22.
59. MN, p. 177.
60. Lord Raingo (1926), p. 24.
61. Raingo, p. 10.
62. MN, p. 170.
63. MN, p. 173.
64. Raingo, p. 10; p. 242.
65. TT, p. 410.
66. TT, p. 405.
67. TT, p. 401.
68. PL, p. 296.
69. PL, p. 324.
70. Journals, I, 234.
71. Whom God hath Joined (1906), p. 33; pp. 273–5.
72. WGJ, p. 258.
73. WGJ, p. 146.
74. WGJ, p. 416.
75. WGJ, p. 24.

76. WGJ, p. 147.

CHAPTER 4

1. Bennett and Wells, ed. Harris Wilson (1960), p. 85; Letters, II, 172.
2. Geoffrey N. Leech and Michael H. Short, Style in Fiction (1981), p. 269.
3. It should be understood that novelists usually convey a general impression of sympathy, or, in some cases, pity, for the protagonist, even though they do not necessarily agree with his every action and thought.
4. Of course both methods of presentation are conventions. In either case the reader is ultimately accepting the author's word for the authenticity of what is described. The difference between Anna and the narrator in terms of point of view is merely a matter of degree in the *pretence* of authenticity.
5. R. J. Sherrington, Three Novels by Flaubert (1970), pp. 132-6.
6. Although some of the descriptive passages are presented from the point of view of both Anna and Mynors, Mynors functions only as a foil. His own point of view never really occurs.
7. Tillier, p. 28.
8. Bennett notes in his journal entry for November 7th, 1899 about the ending of Anna: 'The end will have to be approached more slowly; it needs to be prepared; and when it comes it must be described with much greater detail.' Despite these remarks, he failed to give the story a sufficiently credible ending. The last two chapters of the novel appear far too sketchy.
9. Tillier, p. 28.
10. Virginia Woolf, Mrs Dalloway (Chatto and Windus, 1968), pp. 18-9.
11. It is possible to view things from a particular character's point of view without representing his thoughts, but when the author chooses to represent a character's thoughts, in whatever form, the reader is expected to view things from that character's point of view.
12. Leech and Short, pp. 337-41. In some ways this

categorization is inadequate. For instance, it does not cover the following method of thought presentation in Mrs Dalloway: 'Of course I did, thought Peter;... I was more happy than I've been since, he thought.' (1968, p. 47.) If the sentences were Direct Thought, then the quotation marks are missing. They cannot be regarded as Free Direct Thought, because there are the reporting clauses 'thought Peter' and 'he thought'. Both sentences convey a stronger impression of involvement than Direct Thought might have. However, as they still retain an intervening narrative voice, they are not as direct a thought presentation as Free Direct Thought might have rendered them. They can therefore be regarded as an intermediary mode between Free Direct Thought and Direct Thought.

13. See Leech and Short, p. 269.
14. Stephen Ullmann, The Style in the French Novel (Oxford, 1957), pp. 94–120. In Ullmann's terminology, 'free indirect style' covers both Free Indirect Thought and Free Indirect Speech. It is now out of favour with stylisticians. The differentiation of the two terms is a later development. In recent stylistic studies, some stylisticians use the term 'Free Indirect Discourse', which also cover both Free Indirect Thought and Free Indirect Speech.
15. Ullmann, p. 118.
16. OWT, p. 529.
17. C, p. 270.
18. Brian McHale, 'Free Indirect Discourse: a Survey of Recent Account', Poetics and the Theory of Literature, III, 1978, 275.
19. Ullmann, p. 119.
20. McHale, 249–64; Ullmann, pp. 94–120.
21. Journals, I, 6.
22. OWT, p. 36.
23. OWT, p. 250.
24. Roberts, p. 200.
25. Madame Bovary, p. 128.
26. Madame Bovary, p. 130.
27. George Eliot, Adam Bede (1973), pp. 37–8.
28. Leech and Short, pp. 334–6.

29. Ullmann, p. 97; McHale, 275.
30. Leech and Short, p. 334.
31. Ullmann, p. 117.
32. OWT, p. 137.
33. Journals, I, 19.
34. MN, p. 178.
35. C, p. 237.

CHAPTER 5

1. Journals, I, 84-5.
2. Journals, I, 46-7.
3. In William Shaw's When I was a Child, the Potteries are described as sordid and disfigured by the pottery industry. In a recent trip to the city of Stoke-on-Trent, the present writer found the region almost unchanged from Shaw's description more than eighty years ago.
4. Fame and Fiction, pp. 201-2.
5. Craft,
6. Fame and Fiction, pp. 256-7.
7. Truth, p. 91.
8. George Gissing, Charles Dickens (1926), p. 71.
9. C, pp. 234-5.
10. Craft, p. 37.
11. C, pp. 237-8.
12. OWT, p. 536.
13. Mario Praz, The Hero in Eclipse in Victorian Fiction, tr. Angus Davidson (1969), p. 149.
14. OWT, pp. 536-7.
15. OWT, p. 536.
16. OWT, p. 538.

17. OWT, p. 538.
18. MN, pp. 97–8.
19. Anna, p. 220.
20. OWT, p. 249.
21. Roberts, p. 174.
22. Hilda Lessways (Harmondsworth, 1975), p. 30.
23. The Savour of Life, p. iv.
24. Journals, I, 255.
25. Journals, I, 285–6.
26. Anna, p. 157.
27. MN, p. 99.
28. C, p. 190.
29. The Matador of the Five Towns (1912), p. 40.
30. TT, p. 400.
31. HL, pp. 47–8.
32. HL, p. 129.
33. HL, p. 219.
34. HL, p. 269.
35. Imperial Palace (October, 1930), p. 423.
36. Oscar Wilde, De Profundis (1949), p. 78.

CHAPTER 6

1. OWT, pp. 56–7.
2. Charles Dickens, Dombey and Son (Harmondsworth, 1970), p. 49.
3. Thomas Hardy, The Mayor of Casterbridge (Harmondsworth, 1978), p. 221.
4. HL, p. 31.

5. Virginia Woolf, Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown (1924), p. 13.
6. Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown, p. 16.
7. MN, p. 68.
8. Craft, pp. 28–9.
9. Samuel Hynes, The Edwardian Occasions (1972), pp. 31–2.
10. Virginia Woolf, To the Lighthouse (Glasgow, 1983), pp. 29–30.
11. Quoted by Samuel Hynes, The Edwardian Turn of Mind (Princeton, 1968), pp. 331–2.
12. The 'Evening Standard' Years, p. 49.
13. OWT, pp. 35–6.
14. Anna, p. 107.
15. Craft, pp. 9–10.
16. Letters, II, 94.
17. Etienne Gilson, Painting and Reality (1957), p. 223.
18. C, p. 237.
19. Madame Bovary, p. 12.
20. Madame Bovary, p. 12.
21. Madame Bovary, pp. 12–3.
22. Madame Bovary, p. 13.
23. Anna, p. 19.
24. William Somerset Maugham, Liza of Lambeth (1947), p. 4.
25. Hardy, p. 229.
26. George Gissing, The Nether World (Brighton, 1974), p. 4.
27. MN, p. 3.
28. Ashmolean Museum, Catalogue of the Collection of Dutch and Flemish Still-life Pictures Bequeathed by Daisy Linda Ward (Oxford, 1950), p. 169.
29. Gilson, pp. 25–6.
30. Journals (New York), I, 391.

31. Journals (New York), II, 200.
32. Craft, pp. 37–9.
33. Craft, p. 25.
34. Anna, pp. 105–6.
35. WGJ, pp. 4–5.
36. Shaw, p. 29.

CHAPTER 7

1. The 'Evening Standard' Years, p. 118
2. Heritage, pp. 193–4.
3. MN, p. 147.
4. Journals, I, 197.
5. Sacred and Profane Love (1905), p. 55.
6. SPL, p. 117.
7. Lucas, p. 72.
8. Lucas, p. 71.
9. SPL, p. 50.
10. SPL, p. 52.
11. SPL, p. 52.
12. SPL, p. 117.
13. SPL, pp. 117–8.
14. SPL, p. 118.
15. Lucas, p. 72.
16. MN, pp. 6–7.
17. Journal, II, 196.
18. PL, p. 12.
19. PL, p. 62.

20. PL, pp. 174–5.
21. Maupassant, A Woman's Life, pp. 51–2.
22. OWT, p. 289.
23. Zola, Thérèse Raquin, pp. 61–2.
24. Lafourcade, p. 176.
25. Letters, III, 60–1.
26. Journal, II, 239.
27. The Edwardian Turn of Mind, pp. 279–80.
28. Craft, p. 113.
29. Journals, II, 258–9.
30. Craft, pp. 112–3.
31. Lafourcade, p. 13.
32. Lafourcade, p. 13.
33. OWT, p. 32.
34. L, p. 5.
35. L, p. 293.
36. L, p. 299.
37. L, p. 303.
38. L, p. 360.
39. Unpublished journal of Bennett, quoted by Hepburn, p. 21.
40. Hepburn, p. 21.
41. OWT, p. 294.
42. OWT, p. 294.
43. OWT, p. 294.
44. OWT, p. 408.
45. OWT, p. 411.
46. OWT, p. 411.
47. OWT, p. 408.

48. OWT, p. 464.
49. James Hall, Arnold Bennett: Primitivism and Taste, (Washington, 1959), p. 8.
50. Craft, pp. 58–9.
51. Craft, p. 45.
52. Craft, pp. 48–9.
53. Craft, pp. 39–43.
54. Craft, p. 46.
55. Craft, pp. 46–7
56. Craft, p. 47.
57. Craft, p. 52.
58. Craft, p. 52; p. 55.
59. Craft, p. 60.

CHAPTER 8

1. Letters, III, 201.
2. As for example, Thérèse Raquin, Germinie Lacerteux, Eugénie Grandet, Anna of the Five Towns, Helen with the High Hand. Bennett's interest in the social position of servants ran throughout his career. In 1908, when discussing the 'British Home', he maintained: 'The home of the Smiths [the imagined British middle-class family] has a very real enemy, and that enemy is not outside, but inside. That enemy is Matilda [the imagined servant to the family]. She sleeps in the attic, and earns eighteen pounds a year, rising to twenty pounds. She doesn't count, and yet she is the factor which, more than any other, will modify the home of the Smiths.' He drew attention to the fact that Matilda was not being treated as a fellow human being and proposed his solutions to the 'servant problem': 'Mechanical inventions will have to be quickened in order to replace Matilda's red hands. And there will be those suburban restaurants! And I have a pleasing vision of young John, in the home which *he* builds, cleaning his own boots.' (Paris Nights, 1913, pp. 343–6.) In a letter to Dorothy Bennett dated 21 May, 1930, concerning her tyrannical treatment of servants, Bennett noted: 'As regards servants, you are decades behind the times. You are in the stuffy Victorian eighties.... No experienced servant will

accept the cannon that all orders must be obeyed.' (Letters, IV, ed. James Hepburn, 1986, 588.) Further evidence of Bennett's sympathy towards the servant class can be found in The Old Wives' Tale, Hilda Lessways and Clayhanger.

3. It is not irrelevant to draw attention to the concluding paragraph of Germinal by Zola, who, as has been shown in Chapter 2, initially attracted Bennett to French realism and naturalism: 'The April sun was now well up in the sky, shedding its glorious warming rays on the teeming earth. Life was springing from her fertile womb, buds were bursting into leaf and the fields were quickening with fresh green grass. Everywhere seeds were swelling and lengthening, cracking open the plane in their upward thrust for warmth and light. The sap was rising in abundance with whispering voices, the germs of life were opening with a kiss. On and on, ever more insistently, his [Etienne Lantier's] comrades were tapping, tapping, as though they were rising through the ground. On this youthful morning, in the fiery rays of the sun, the whole country was alive with this sound. Men were springing up, a black avenging host was slowly germinating in the furrows, thrusting upwards for the harvests of future ages. And very soon their germination would crack the earth asunder.' (Harmondsworth, 1954, tr. L. W. Tancock, pp. 496-7.) The starving miners' strike led by Etienne Lantier has been crushed by the joint forces of the bosses and the state, the only sensible way for Zola to sympathize with their defeat would seem to use the poetical image of germination to suggest their future triumph.
4. Riceyman Steps (Pan, 1964), p. 23.
5. RS, p. 24.
6. RS, p. 39.
7. RS, p. 39.
8. RS, p. 84.
9. RS, p. 85.
10. RS, p. 135. Relevant is the fact that Bennett uses 'bland', 'placid', 'gentle' and words of the same roots and of similar meanings on numerous occasions to describe Earlforward.
11. RS, p. 33.
12. RS, p. 35. Bennett is ironic here. John Lucas is wrong to take these words seriously. See, Arnold Bennett, a Study of his Fiction (1974), p. 201.
13. RS, p. 114.

14. RS, p. 187; p. 194.
15. RS, pp. 44-5.
16. RS, p. 43.
17. RS, p. 45.
18. RS, p. 106.
19. RS, p. 108.
20. RS, p. 85; p. 103.
21. The central interest of the huge orgy-scene of L'Assommoir, in which the heroine Gervaise celebrates her birthday and which marks the heyday of her 'career', is a goose: 'it was the best that was to be found at the poulterer's in the Faubourg-Poissonniere; it weighted twelve pounds and a half by the coal-dealer's scales; it had taken a bushel of coals to cook; and it made three bowlfuls of dripping.' (Emile Zola, L'Assommoir, tr. Arthur Symons, Penguin, 1968, pp. 218-9.) All the characters of the novel participate with gusto in the consumption of the goose, yet its final annihilation is carried out by a cat: 'all night long, while the Coupeaus lay slumbering heavily, sleeping off the effects of the dinner, a neighbour's cat, taking advantage of an open window, went steadily to work on what remained of the goose, cracking the bones of the creature with the tiny sound of its sharp teeth.' (p. 239.) From this point onwards, the Coupeau family go from bad to worse. In the end, Coupeau dies of a violent insanity caused by alcoholism. Gervaise in her depression also takes to drink, becomes mad, and dies a pathetic animal death.
22. RS, p. 249.
23. RS, p. 148.
24. RS, p. 26.
25. RS, p. 26.
26. RS, p. 27.
27. RS, p. 30.
28. RS, p. 117.
29. RS, p. 127.
30. RS, pp. 138-9.
31. RS, p. 174.

32. RS, p. 184.
33. RS, p. 261.
34. RS, p. 46.
35. RS, p. 184; p. 185.
36. RS, pp. 246–7. Earlier in Sacred and Profane Love, Carlotta's seduction occurs at precisely the same moment as the death of her already seriously ill aunt. In Helen with the High Hand, young people's courtship is conducted in the grave-yard. In The Old Wives' Tale John Baines dies simultaneously with Sophia's flirtation with Scales.
37. RS, p. 248.
38. RS, p.33; p. 65; p. 113; p. 198; p. 232, and etc.
39. RS, pp. 107–8.
40. RS, p. 265.
41. RS, p. 224.
42. RS, p. 258.
43. RS, p. 260.
44. RS, p. 108.
45. RS, p. 261.
46. OWT, p. 571.
47. RS, p. 151.
48. RS, pp. 233–4.
49. RS, pp. 219–20.
50. RS, p. 152.
51. RS, pp. 117–8.
52. RS, p. 248.
53. RS, p. 209.
54. RS, p. 153; p. 180.
55. RS, p. 198.
56. RS, p. 33.

- 57. RS, pp. 135–7.
- 58. RS, p. 154.
- 59. RS, p. 264.
- 60. Religious Interregnum (1929), p. 10.
- 61. RS, p. 237.
- 62. RS, p. 162.

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